

PLUCK AND LUCK

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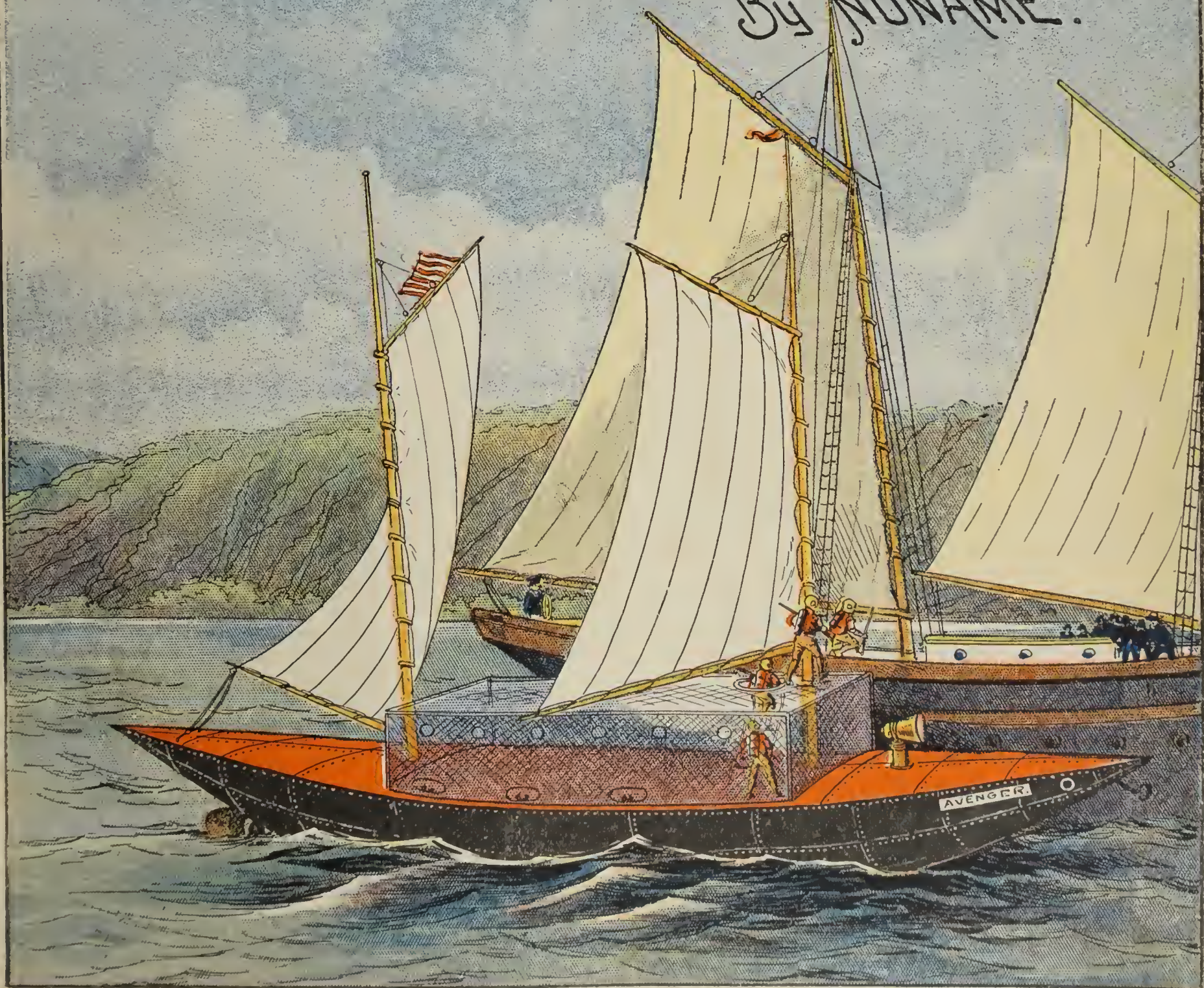
No. 206.

NEW YORK, MAY 14, 1902.

Price 5 Cents.

JACK WRIGHT AND HIS ELECTRIC CANOE! OR, WORKING IN THE REVENUE SERVICE.

By NONAME.



As soon as the canoe glided alongside of the schooner Jack opened the door in the canopy and passed out, followed by his friends. To their amazement not a shot was fired at them by the smugglers.

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NEW YORK, MAY 14, 1902.

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CHAPTER I.

MYSTERIOUS ACTIONS.

It was a warm, moonlit night in May, and the beautiful fisher village of Wrightstown was aglow, the water of the bay, at the head of which the settlement nestled, gleamed like a mirror, and the streets were thronged with people.

Upon the outskirts of the village there stood an imposing house, surrounded by a magnificently laid out garden, at the back of which was a fine brick building used as a workshop by the house owner.

Jack Wright was the name of this wealthy, orphaned resident, and although he was accounted a millionaire, he was only between eighteen and nineteen years of age, and had earned every dollar he possessed.

The boy was a celebrated inventor of submarine boats, and by the use of these marvelous contrivances he had gathered his fortune from the bottom of the sea, in various parts of the globe.

Upon the night in question he sat upon the broad piazza which surrounded his house, deeply thinking over a new electric canoe he had finished building, when he saw a woman with a baby in her arms, and a little girl at her side, about three years of age, in the act of going over the street in front of his gate.

The woman crossed, but the little girl paused to pick up a toy she had dropped, and then started on a run after her mother, when upon reaching the middle of the street she tripped, fell, struck her forehead upon a stone and laid inanimate.

At that moment a team of fiery big percheron horses, hitched to a heavy wagon, was approaching at a furious pace, the beasts frightened at something, and straining every effort to get away from the driver, who tugged at the reins with all his might.

A chill of horror passed over Jack, for he saw that the unmanageable team would in one minute more reach the prostrate figure of the little child, and trample her to death with their iron shod hoofs.

With one leap the young inventor reached the walk leading to the gate, and with a rush he landed in the middle of the street, between the prancing horses and the imperiled child.

The excited beasts were already over the little unfortunate, when one step more would have decided her fate, but a grip of steel was upon the horses' bridles, and as the boy seized them he jerked them back, when up they went upon their haunches.

A shriek of terror pealed from the child's mother as she missed the little girl from her side, glanced back, and saw her danger, and as the courageous boy retained his clutch upon the rearing team, she came rushing back, and dragged her little one away.

"Back!" shouted Jack ringingly.

Snorting and plunging, the foam-flecked team obeyed the command with a sudden jolt that flung one of the cases contained in the wagon out upon the road with a violent crash, and then the creatures paused.

The driver cursed at the boy for his interference in the

most furious tones, for the packing case that went out over the tail-board had burst open, and scattered its contents all over the road.

Jack's dark eyes flashed fire over the insulting language of the driver, and he drew his handsomely clad, sturdy figure up, and remarked:

"If I had not stopped your horses they would have crushed the life out of that poor little child. Be kind enough, therefore, to bridle your tongue, for you were certainly unable to stop the team yourself."

"Curse the infernal brat!" snarled the driver, glaring balefully at the poor woman, who was carrying her senseless little daughter into a drug store. "What did she fall in my way for? I wish I had run over her! And as for you, for two pins I'd come down there and break your neck for interfering with my horses, see? Holy Moses! Look at that case—all busted to pieces!"

"You had better come down and try!" said Jack, in angry tones.

"I had, hey?" roared the driver, who was a great, hulking fellow in rough clothes, possessing twice the weight and strength of the boy. "Well, I will, and, by thunder, I reckon you won't be so smart and sassy the next time!"

He sprang to the ground, and made a rush for the boy, expecting to give Jack one blow and half kill him, but the boy nimbly dodged the punch, and let drive his own fist, catching the man in the eye.

Biff! Bang! Thump! rattled in three more stinging undercuts from the active young inventor, the driver striking out wildly and only punching air, for two of the blows caught him in the eyes, and the last one landed on his jugular vein, and knocked him spinning.

A more surprised bully never existed than that driver when he found himself lying upon his back, both of his optics in mourning, his nose swelling up, and his neck feeling as if it were struck by a battering ram.

"Stop!" he yelled. "I've got enough."

"Get up, and clear out, then," said the boy. "Let this be a lesson to you not to be so heartless in the future—do you hear?"

Muttering and grumbling, the man arose, brushed the dust off of his clothes, and with an angry look at Jack, he said in more civil tones:

"I guess you're a professional prize-fighter, ain't you?"

"I am a believer in justice, and my name is Jack Wright."

"What! The great inventor of underwater boats?"

"I invent such vessels."

"That settles it! I've made a big mistake running up against you, and I wouldn't have done it if I'd known who you was before."

Just then the boy saw that the scattered contents of the broken cases consisted of bolts of the most elegant silks, laces and embroideries, and he observed that the broken packing case was evidently of foreign make, while the mark upon it was that of a prominent New York importer.

The boy's suspicions were at once aroused, for the box did not have upon it the leaden custom house seal which is put on

goods examined by the authorities, after which the United States revenue is paid.

Moreover, it struck the boy as singular that these valuable goods should be carted at night through Wrightstown, for no such expensive fabrics were used in that place in such large quantities.

The driver put the case back in the wagon, and picking up the scattered goods, he began to pack them into it, until he had them all back again.

He was just about to enter the wagon and drive off, when Jack said:

"Say, my friend, where did those things come from, anyway?"

The driver gave a violent start, shot a startled glance at Jack, and turned pale.

"Is that anything to you?" he growled evasively.

"Yes, it is," emphatically declared the boy. "It looks very much to me as if those goods never paid duty in the Custom House."

The look of guilty fear upon the driver's face intensified; but mastering his alarm by a violent effort, he forced a hollow laugh, and assuming as careless an air as he could, he said:

"Well, since you are so anxious to know all about my business, I don't mind telling you that a dry goods store in D— failed, and I'm carting these goods to the railroad depot here to ship them back to the owners in New York who billed them to the storekeeper who failed."

Although this explanation seemed plausible enough, it did not convince Jack; but he made no reply, and with a relieved look the man concluded that he was satisfied, mounted his wagon, and drove hastily away in the direction of the railroad depot.

"I'll follow him, and copy the marks on those boxes," the boy thought, "and if it should transpire as I suspect, that those goods are smuggled goods, I'll know just where to put my hands upon the guilty parties!"

And so thinking the boy started after the wagon.

For some time past Jack had been reading in the newspapers that the U. S. revenue service was not adequate to cope with the vast amount of smuggling that was carried on along the Atlantic coast, and considerable suspicion was directed to that part of the seaboard in the vicinage of Wrightstown.

The appearance of the goods he had just discovered, coupled with the suspicious actions of the driver, and the manner of their transportation, excited Jack's interest, and he resolved to sift the matter through.

Upon his arrival at the depot he found that there were six cases, including the broken one, left upon the depot platform.

The driver and his wagon had disappeared, and the broken case was then being repaired by a man who was paid for the service.

All of the boxes were consigned to Harry Hunter, of New York, and the boy copied the directions marked upon them, put his note book and lead pencil in his pocket, and then withdrew his handkerchief to wipe the perspiration from his brow.

He had hardly done so, however, when a man with a sandy beard came from behind the station, clad in a rough-looking suit of clothes, and peering hard at Jack a moment, he took a handkerchief from his pocket and swung it in his hand at his side.

A feeling of surprise took possession of the boy, and he eyed the stranger narrowly, and replaced his handkerchief in his pocket.

"That looked like a signal he made then," he muttered.

The stranger was evidently not a resident of Wrightstown,

for every one in the place was acquainted with the young inventor, and this individual certainly was not, for he walked up to Jack, and said in low tones:

"Your signal was all right. I saw the handkerchief as soon as you had it in your hand. But you are early. I was not to meet you until eight o'clock, and it is only half-past seven now."

"Indeed!" said Jack, wondering what the stranger meant.

"However, it don't make any difference," said the man, handing Jack an envelope. "If you wish to handle the goods this note will direct you where to find us, and give you all the points. Good-night!"

And turning abruptly upon his heel, the stranger walked away, and soon disappeared from view, going along a country road leading to the coast.

"Whew!" whistled Jack in astonishment, as he tore open the envelope. "This is mysterious! He mistook me for some one else, whom he evidently was to meet here to-night."

CHAPTER II.

CAUGHT RED-HANDED.

It was very evident to Jack that the letter portended something of a secret nature, else the bearer of it would not have acted so mysteriously.

Convinced that there was an unlawful color to the affair, the boy did not hesitate to read the letter, and found it couched in these terms:

"Mr. Harry Hunter:—The six cases were landed all right from the steamer Southern Cross, by our schooner the Sly Lass, and were taken ashore to our rendezvous, at the cavern in Wreckers' Crag. We have sent them to the railroad depot of Wrightstown, where our agent will hand you this letter, and the car man will leave the bill of lading with the freight agent, from whom you can get it. There is no need of your coming to the cave, for the less people seen about here, the less attention will be attracted. Should you have occasion to come, however, let it be alone. Get the goods out of Wrightstown as soon as you receive this, and I shall call upon you to-morrow for a check in payment of our share of the work. Having fulfilled our part of the contract, the work of getting the cases away devolves upon you, and none of the gang appear on the scene now, for the obvious reason that they don't wish to run any risk of exposure and capture, if anything now goes wrong. Yours truly, Ralph Redfern."

A startled look crossed Jack's face.

"Smugglers!" he muttered.

It was evident at a glance that he had accidentally discovered a most infamous plot to rob the United States of its revenues, the nefarious gang who were working it for the benefit of well-known importers of New York operating in the immediate vicinity of Wrightstown.

The letter clearly proved that, and verified the grave suspicions which Jack had entertained as soon as he saw the case of merchandise fall from the wagon in front of the house, disclosing its contents.

An organized gang of smugglers had evidently made a rendezvous of Wreckers' Crag cavern, the location of which was very familiar to Jack, and aided by a schooner they doubtless transferred unmanifested goods from incoming vessels, and smuggled them ashore to avoid paying the duty on them.

This showed very clearly that there were combinations formed between the foreign agents who shipped the goods, agents on board of the vessels, the smugglers on this side, and the importers for whom they worked.

For several moments Jack studied the matter over, and he then went into the station and accosted the freight agent, who was acquainted with him.

"Will you please give me the bill of lading left in your care by a carman for the six cases out on the platform?" asked the boy.

"Certainly, Mr. Wright," politely replied the man, handing it over. "I did not know that it was you who was shipping that freight to New York; but the driver said a young fellow would call for the bill."

"He must have meant me," blandly replied the boy. "Thank you! By Jove! he has made out the bill of lading wrong, as well as marked the cases wrong! What an error! Here, give me another bill of lading, please."

Never suspecting the trick Jack was playing upon him, the agent complied, and Jack filled it out with his own name, and designated the six cases to the seizure room of the Custom House, New York.

He then went outside, and erasing the name of Harry Hunter from the cases, he directed them the same as the bill of lading.

The station agent held Jack Wright in such respect as the leading citizen of the village that the boy had not the least difficulty in deceiving him into the belief that he was the shipper of the cases, that they were sent misdirected, and that he had come to the depot to rectify the error.

Had it been any other person than Jack Wright the man would not have permitted such a thing to be done unless he could prove his ownership to the freight, lax though some agents are at country way stations.

A southbound train came thundering in by the time Jack had finished his work, and the freight was taken aboard and carried away New Yorkward.

The boy watched the cars until they disappeared around a bend, and then thought:

"I have assumed a good deal of risk in acting this way without proof that those cases are smuggled. If I have made a mistake I can afford to pay for the blame, but if I haven't I've foiled the smugglers at their own game!"

A train from New York came in a few minutes afterward, and two passengers alighted from it, one a distinguished-looking gentleman, with a full beard and handsome clothing, the other a short, surly-looking young man in a derby and gray business suit.

The former stopped and spoke to the station agent, then hurried away, while the latter stood looking around expectantly a few moments, and then pulling a handkerchief from his pocket, he swung it conspicuously to and fro at his side.

As soon as Jack's glance rested upon him, and he observed the young man's actions, he muttered:

"By Jove, there's the fellow for whom I was mistaken by the smuggler's emissary, and he is giving the signal probably agreed upon, by which the smuggler would know he was Harry Hunter."

A smile of derision crossed Jack's face, and he walked over to the man, drew out his handkerchief, and swung it.

"Ain't you Mr. Harry Hunter?" the boy asked in low tones.

"I am," was the eager reply. "And you come from Ralph Redfern?"

"Yes," replied Jack. "What are you after, the six cases of goods?"

"Exactly. I want to ship them on to New York."

"I have already sent them."

"But Redfern refused to do any more than get them off the Southern Cross, bring them ashore, and land them at this depot."

"Of course he did."

"How were they directed?"

"To the seizure rooms at the Custom House."

"The deuce!" ejaculated Harry Hunter, with a violent start.

"And you," continued Jack coolly, as he seized the young man by the collar, "are my prisoner!"

A startled cry burst from the young man's lips, and he recoiled; but Jack had a clutch upon him from which there was no breaking away.

"Let me go!" gasped Hunter, struggling violently to free himself.

"Not much," replied Jack grimly. "Your game is up, and I arrest you on a charge of defrauding the U. S. revenue, Harry Hunter."

The young man was as pale as death, and a lurid light gleamed in his blue eyes as he pulled a pistol from his pocket and hissed:

"If you don't let up on me, I'll blow your brains out!"

Jack struck his arm a violent blow with his fist, wringing a cry of pain from Hunter's lips, and caused him drop his weapon.

"None of that!" remarked the young inventor. "I ain't armed, and a one-sided shooting affair is a foul matter, my boy."

Hunter made an effort to tear himself free, but Jack wrestled him, and tripping him up, the stranger fell, with the boy on top of him.

The struggle attracted the attention of the station agent, and he came running to Jack's assistance, when between the two the smuggling importer was rendered helpless by having his arms tied behind his back, and his ankles bound together.

A policeman was then summoned, and without giving any detailed explanation of the cause of the trouble Jack had Hunter arrested.

The boy explained privately to the local magistrate what the charge was, in order to keep the matter a secret until the authorities could be posted, and arrest the rest of the smugglers before they knew that they were exposed.

Leaving Hunter in the jail, Jack started for home to write to the authorities of what he had done, when, just as he came out of the prison, he collided with a little fat Dutch boy, who had a big stomach, a round, chubby face, and light flaxen hair.

This individual was in a boiling fever of excitement, but the violent shock sent him to the sidewalk with a thud, and he roared:

"Donner und blitzen!"

"Why, it's Fritz Schneider!" gasped Jack.

The young Dutchman, somewhat older than the boy inventor, was an old friend, who had accompanied Jack on the different cruises he had made in submarine boats, and lived at Jack's house.

"Shiminey Christmas!" he cried, scrambling to his feet and panting like a locomotive. "Somebody vhas dolt me yer got killed by a fight, und vhas arrested afterwards, so I came down to pail yer oudt alretty."

"It wasn't as bad as that," laughed Jack; "but I'll tell you what it was."

And he thereupon related to Fritz all that had taken place.

When he finished his recital the Dutch boy looked delighted, for he was of a pugnacious disposition, and the story of the fight pleased him excessively.

"I tink yer don't got ter wrote dose ledders py Vashington aboutt dot smucklers vonet," he said, as they walked homeward, "'cause der Custom House vhas come by your house alretty, und he vhas vaitin' dere fer yer now, Shack."

"What do you mean?" asked the boy in surprise.

"Ouch, don'd I vhas shpoken mineselluf blain enough some-dimes?"

"Do you mean to say there is a Custom House officer at my house?"

"I dink so. Anyvay, here vhas his card," answered Fritz. He handed over a bristol-board card, and Jack saw that it bore the name:

PAUL DICER,
Revenue Marine Division, Washington, D. C.

Then the truth at once flashed across the boy's mind, and he said:

"I see through it now. The United States revenue cutter service is an arm of the Treasury Department, under the direction and control of the Secretary of the Treasury, and it is under a bureau of which this gentleman is very likely the chief."

"Vell," said Fritz, "he vhas by der house, vaitin' ter see yer by imbordand beesnees alretty, und yer better vhas go righd home und find oudt vot he vants mit yer."

"I can't imagine what his business with me can be," said Jack, "but he could not have arrived at a more opportune moment, for I can now put the adjustment of this smuggler business into his hands."

They hurried along, and upon reaching Jack's house found the man in the parlor.

CHAPTER III

THE ELECTRIC CANOE.

Jack introduced himself to Mr. Dicer and asked the reason of his call.

"My business," replied the gentleman, "is of rather a serious character. It is, in fact, to ask your co-operation with the U. S. revenue cutter service in the suppression of smuggling, and, while in the service, to render all duties and requirements in accordance with the office."

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure," replied Jack.

"You have already rendered the government a great favor in ridding our merchant marine of a pestiferous pirate in the Yellow Sea," said Mr. Dicer, "and the Government, therefore, knows what a valuable auxiliary any of your wonderful submarine vessels would be to it in the present instance. It has come to our knowledge that there is more crime rampant along this coast than our vessels are capable of managing unaided, and for that reason I am ordered to call upon you and try to gain your assistance temporarily."

"But haven't you got four propellers, stationed at New York, sir?"

"Yes; but only two are rated first class, and the other two are third. There are thirty-six in the entire service, including a bark rigged school ship for cadets, launches, propellers and side wheelers. Twenty-four belong to the cruising fleet, sixteen being on the Atlantic and gulf coasts, four on the northern lakes and four on the Pacific coast. In the principal harbors ten steamers are employed for exclusive custom work, and it is among these we want your boat. One steamer is especially charged with the enforcement of the anchorage laws of the port of New York. The school ship is stationed at New Bedford, Mass. The cutters have a distinctive ensign and pennant and the armament is from one to four guns, with enough small arms to supply their crews."

"But what would my duties be in the revenue service?" asked Jack. "If too much is expected of me I may not accept."

"The general outline," answered Mr. Dicer, with a faint smile, "is to aid many of those who begin as cadets, and, upon graduation, receive appointments from the President to change their monkey jackets for the sword and shoulder straps of a third lieutenant in the regular service."

"Will you give me a brief outline of what is expected of me?"

"Certainly! Security of the customs revenue, assistance of

vessels in distress, protection of wrecked property, enforcement of neutrality laws, enforcement of quarantine, protection of merchant vessels from piratical attacks, the prevention of depredations of vessels upon the timber reserves, the disarrangement of the coast aids to navigation, suppression of mutinies on board vessels, and so on."

"The first mentioned duty is the most important, I presume?"

"It is," replied Mr. Dicer, as he drew a paper from his pocket, "and here is your appointment made out in anticipation of your acceptance. It was made out by the President, and confirmed by the Senate. You have only got the oath of allegiance to take, and your authority will be complete."

They spoke over the matter for some time longer, and then Jack told him about his discovery of the smugglers' secret, and what he did.

Mr. Dicer was amazed and startled.

"You have begun well," he remarked. "I will go and see this man Hunter in jail, and learn all about his movements in the matter."

"If you will defer it until to-morrow, and conclude the matter of my commission," said Jack, "I will take immediate steps to root that gang of smugglers out of Wreckers' Crag!"

"What—to-night?"

"To-night."

"But have you a boat suited to the purpose?"

"I have an electric canoe which will prove to be of better use in the revenue service than the strongest iron clad ever constructed."

"A canoe?"

"Yes, sir. Shall I show it to you?"

"By all means. Where is it?"

"In my workshop at the back of the yard. Come with me, sir."

Accompanied by Fritz and his caller, Jack led the way through the house into the yard, and proceeded to his workshop.

Passing into a water chamber by the side door, Jack turned on a hundred electric lights by pressing a button in the wall, and the huge room became flooded with a dazzling gleam.

In the flooded cellar there floated a metallic boat of the canoe type, about forty feet in length by eight feet beam, and two feet draught, her bow and stern tapering to fine points.

Her lines were very fine, her fore and aft decks oval, and she carried two masts to which batwing sails were attached.

In the clear water it could be seen that she had a rudder and a two-bladed screw, which was run by electric storage batteries, while on the forward deck stood a small searchlight of 20,000 candle power, connected with the battery that ran the boat.

There were two holes in the bow, and a glance within their dark apertures showed the muzzles of two small, powerful guns within.

The greater part of the deck was covered by finely woven aluminum wire, bullet-proof netting, which was, in fact, a telescope deck-house, which could be raised or lowered automatically by an ingenious mechanism concealed within the hull.

It had three holes through it, so that when in disuse the boat's crew could sit and paddle the boat with the spoon blades provided for that purpose, while all around it were circular loopholes, through which the crew could discharge firearms while keeping their own bodies screened.

Across the bow was painted the name

AVENGER.

"What a graceful, beautiful, yet odd-looking craft!" exclaimed Mr. Dicer. "I see you have a propeller handy in case wind and paddles give out."

"She is very fast under electricity," said Jack proudly, "for in a recent trial trip I found her capable of making thirty knots an hour."

"Remarkable! Remarkable! She could then easily overtake any of the fastest steamships of which she might be in pursuit."

"I tink so neider," said Fritz solemnly.

"Should you feel so inclined," said Jack, "I would be pleased to have you accompany us upon our expedition to-night against Ralph Redfern."

"Oh, no, thank you," hastily said Mr. Dicer. "I am perfectly contented to grapple with criminals ashore, without running chances on the sea, opposed to a smuggler's guns in such a small boat as this."

He made a close examination of the boat, and then the trio went out.

Jack was sworn in before a notary public, and Harry Hunter was next visited and closely questioned, but stubbornly refused to confess anything, upon seeing which Mr. Dicer had him handcuffed, and conducted him to the cars to take him to New York, where an examination would be made of the six cases of goods, the bill of lading for which Jack gave Dicer.

It was ten o'clock when Jack left the gentleman and his morose prisoner on board of a train bound for New York and started for home again.

He now was enlisted temporarily in the U. S. revenue service, and had a course of action mapped out by Mr. Dicer, the first move of which was to attack the smugglers of Wreckers' Crag.

He was thinking the matter over as he passed down the main street, when suddenly a man dashed out of a dark alley in back of him, and flinging an arm around Jack's neck he strangled a cry that arose to the boy's lips, and dragged him into the alley.

Struggling with all his might to get away was of no avail to the boy, his captor held him at such a disadvantage, and he saw another fellow come gliding over to the one who attacked him, and heard him ask:

"Have you got him safe, Ralph Redfern?"

"He can't utter a sound," was the gruff reply.

"It's the smuggler of Wreckers' Crag!" flashed across Jack's mind.

"Shall I chloroform him?" queried the newcomer.

"You may as well. It will keep him still. We've got a desperate game to play, Billy, for I heard him at his own house making arrangements with the Chief of the revenue marine division of Washington to go for us at Wreckers' Crag with one of his infernal torpedo boats and blow us to pieces. It is a good thing for us I saw him collar Hunter and watched him ever since, or I would not have known how he discovered what we have been doing and tripped us up."

Like a flash it occurred to Jack that all his plans were exposed to the very ones from whom he wished to keep his movements a secret.

The man called Billy produced a sponge and phial, poured the liquid contents of the latter upon the former, and then clapped the saturated sponge over his nostrils to drug him.

Jack drew a deep respiration before it touched him, and then held his breath, with a grim resolve to smother before he would allow himself to inhale the subtle fumes of the drug.

Instantly he relaxed all his muscles, and laid limply in Ralph Redfern's arms, when the rascal was deceived into the belief that he had succumbed to the influence of the chloroform.

Fortunately for Jack, the sponge did not remain over his face a full minute, when Redfern laid him down, and said

"There, Billy, that will do. He's as stupid as a log."

"What are you goin' to do with him, sir?" questioned the other.

"Do? Why, carry the whelp away, and keep him a captive at the cave, of course. As long as we hold him we will have an advantage and make our own terms with the authorities in case of need."

Redfern picked the shamming boy up by the shoulders, and his companion took hold of Jack's ankles, when this was said, and they carried him through the alley into the dark lane in back.

Here there was a horse and wagon hitched to a tree, in which they had come from their rendezvous, and they laid Jack in the bottom of the vehicle, and Redfern untied the horses.

They both got into the wagon then, and drove away along the unfrequented and unlighted lane, to avoid being seen.

Not ten paces had their horses taken, however, when they heard a sharp "click—click!" in back of them, and they both turned around.

Jack was standing up there, they saw in surprise, and in each of the boy's hands gleamed a revolver that was pointed at their heads.

"Gentlemen, you are my prisoners!" exclaimed the young inventor.

CHAPTER IV.

OFF IN THE CANOE.

The consternation of the smuggler captain and his man knew no bounds, and they were about to spring from the wagon to make their escape, when Jack sternly exclaimed:

"Stop! If you budge an inch I'll fire."

"Mercy!" gasped Redfern, in trembling tones, for he had heard of the young inventor's reputation, and knew that he would not hesitate to fire and sacrifice their lives if the occasion warranted the deed.

"I shall only spare you on one condition," coolly said Jack.

"Name it," gasped the smuggler.

"You are to drive down into the main street to the jail."

"Never!" yelled Redfern vehemently.

"I thought he was asleep," whined Bill in agonized tones.

"Disobey me, and you'll take the consequences."

"Yes, yes! I'll do it!" screamed Redfern in terror, for just then the boy touched his temple with the cold muzzle of his revolver, and he started the trotting horse in the direction desired.

Every one in the street was amazed to see Jack Wright standing up in a wagon driving two strange men along at the points of a brace of revolvers toward the jail, and a fast gathering crowd followed them.

As soon as they reached the prison several policemen came out and made prisoners of the two men, Jack going into the station and preferring his charges against them in due form. The news was telegraphed to Paul Dicer.

He then started for home again, and upon reaching the street he saw an old sailor with a sandy beard, a wooden leg and a glass eye come hobbling toward him, a broad grin upon his face.

"Shiver me, lad," he chuckled, slapping his leg. "but yer wuz a-tackin' along this street under sich a full head o' sail, jist now, I didn't ha' time ter hail yer, an' wot's more, I seen yer wouldn't haul to, even if I'd a-fired a broadside o' questions inter yer craft on wheels."

"Tim Topstay!" ejaculated Jack, recognizing an old friend in the ancient mariner, who had gone on all his voyages with

him. "What brought you around from the tap room of the Sea Spider House?"

"How could a lubber stow away his reg'lar 'lowance o' grog when thar's been sich a gale o' deviltry a-blowin', I wanten know?" growled the old sailor, taking a chew of navy plug, and giving a hitch at his pants in true man-o'-warsman style. "Lor' save yer timbers, I heered ther story o' how yer got yer grapnels on 'em, an' I only wishes as I wuz sailin' wi' yer, ter lend a helpin' hand."

"It was Ralph Redfern himself," said the boy, "and as I am going to attack the rest of his crew at Wreckers' Crag to-night, I want you to come back home with me now. Fritz is at the shop getting the canoe in readiness for immediate departure, and we have no time to spare, as some of Redfern's spies may be prowling about Wrightstown, and might go back to the smuggler's cave to warn them of our coming. We have got to attack them to-night, Tim."

"Aye, aye, lad, but whar's yer authority? That's work for ther revenue marine, an' devil a right has land lubbers like us ter do it."

"I have been invested with that right already, old fellow," said Jack, and he hastily explained the night's doings to the old sailor as they made their way back to his house, linked arm in arm.

Tim was very much amazed at the story.

"Can't take Whiskers an' Bismarck along wi' us on this voyage?" he said, referring to a pet monkey and parrot, owned respectively by Fritz and himself, "an' thank ther shades o' Neptune that 'ere gosh-blamed accordeen o' Fritz's will ha' ter stay ashore, which'll add ten years ter my mortal life."

He alluded to an instrument the Dutch boy played that tormented him dreadfully, as the music was so rank as to be hideous to his nerves.

They found everything in readiness under Fritz's care when they at last reached the workshop, and got aboard of the canoe.

Here they each put on a diving suit of aluminum, like ancient knights' armor.

There were air reservoirs strapped on the backs, containing enough compressed air to last several hours under water, but they now wore them with the visors open, as they were to serve as bullet-proof armor in case of a combat with the smugglers at Wreckers' Crag.

The boat steered by a wheel at the bow, and there were several levers on a switchboard, by which the electric apparatus was controlled, in front of the compass box, beside the steering gear, while stowed away in the lockers under the side decks were arms and ammunition of a peculiar pattern, invented by Jack Wright.

Fritz had an electric cooking stove aft, and plenty of provisions and water aboard, and being himself an excellent chef, there was no likelihood of any of them going hungry.

As soon as everything was in readiness, Jack took up his position at the wheel and rang the gong, when two of his workman opened a door in the building, and the boy started the propeller, when the Avenger glided out of the cellar into a broad creek that ran along the foot of Jack's garden down to Wrightstown Bay.

The canoe passed swiftly into the moonlit bay.

It was now near midnight, and not a soul was to be seen.

Lights gleamed along the shore of the bay in the fishermen's cottages and other buildings, bulkhead lights were shown at the pier that ran out into the water, and peak lanterns gleamed on a fleet of fishing smacks that rode at anchor off the beach.

The canoe started for the opening of the headland, beside which there rose a lighthouse erected by Jack, the dioptric flashlight of which shone far out at sea.

A fair wind was blowing, and the surface of the water was ruffled by tiny waves, over which the canoe lightly rode.

She was furnished with a center-board, and Tim dropped it as Jack stopped the propeller, and they got up the low batwing sails.

The new duck was as white as snow, and as the wind caught it the canoe careened until the waves washed upon the deck to the combing of the cock-pit.

The Avenger behaved beautifully, and sailed very fast.

At a short distance away any one would have mistaken her for an ordinary pleasure craft of the canoe type, save that she was somewhat larger than ordinary boats of that kind, for the real metallic hull was hidden beneath a covering of cedar, riveted and varnished, leaving the wood natural.

Her point of destination was a wild, rocky headland, a few miles up the coast, generally shunned by passing vessels on account of the dangerous character of the sunken rocks lying about it.

A channel wound in among these snags and shoals, which was only familiar to the smuggler, and had his schooner been chased into it by an enemy, she could easily have escaped, while her pursuers would strike upon the rocks and inevitably become a wreck.

The nature of these dangers had given rise to the name borne by the locality, and Jack was well aware of the peril he was about to brave navigating the fatal spot, but he counted high upon the extremely light draught of his boat to pass over the worst rocks safely.

Opening up the headland, the Avenger glided out upon the moonlit sea, and turned to the northward with a beam wind.

"Trim in the sails, Fritz!" exclaimed Jack.

"Yah!" was the Dutch boy's reply, as he complied.

"Let down the center-board to the last notch, Tim."

"Aye, aye, sir!" cheerily answered the old sailor, obeying.

The canoe did not make so much leeway now, and Jack hugged the shore as close as he could without allowing the Avenger to get near enough to the breakers that curled in on the sandy beach to affect her onward progress.

Glancing up at the starry, cloudless sky, the young inventor said regretfully:

"I am sorry it is so clear. A dark night would have favored our design much more than this dazzling moonlight. Still the smugglers won't suspect our design unless some spy has posted them about us."

"Yer vhas knowed how many mens dey vhas got by deir gang?" asked Fritz, making the sheet lines fast to the cleats.

"It was utterly impossible to pump any information out of Redfern or his pal, although I made every effort to ascertain," replied Jack, tacking up as close to the wind as he could hold the canoe without causing her peculiar sails to flutter.

"Waal, I reckon as thar ain't so many o' ther swabs but wot one shot from one o' them 'ere liddle pneumatic guns in ther bow could send 'em a-kitin' up ter ther clouds a-lookin' fer Saint Peter. Talkin' o' guns, wot d'yer think happened ter me some time ago?"

"What?" listlessly asked Jack.

"It happened aboard o' ther ole U. S. frigate Wabash, when yer dead an' gone father an' me wuz messmates."

"Ouch! Here comes a lie from Liarsville!" said Fritz in disgust, for Tim was the most outrageous yarn spinner afloat, and from constant practice he got so that he actually believed his own lies.

Tim scowled at the Dutch boy balefully with his good eye.

"Avast thar!" he growled. "I ain't a'talkin' ter you! As I wuz a-goin' ter say, Jack, we had a dynamite gun aboard o' ther Wabash as could heave a shot thirty miles——"

"Morer or lesser," interposed Fritz, with a grin, "and maybe lesser as morer."

"Belay, gol darn ye! As I wuz a-sayin', this gun wuz

loaded durin' an engagement wi' ther enemy wi' a big charge o' dynamite, did up in a cap, an' I wuz ther one as fired it. Ther shot struck its mark an' busted. Sich a roar I never neerd afore. Ther shock brung down ther rain, an' shook the enemy's spars so hard they fell from ther mast, leavin' her helpless, an' we sailed up ter her an' grappled ther lubber, when——"

"I tort yer, vhas set yer struck dot enemies?" grinned Fritz. "Shut up!" raved Tim savagely. "or I'll——"

"Sail ho!" interposed Jack just then. "Look there, boys, a schooner!"

The vessel he indicated was just coming out from shore under full sail, and as Jack glanced at it with his glass, he gave a start, and cried:

"And, by jingo, it is the smugglers' craft, for I see the name of Sly Lass upon her bow."

CHAPTER V.

WRECKED AT THE SMUGGLERS' LAIR.

The place from which the schooner was sailing was a rugged mass of cliffs lining the shore, and the top of the sea thereabouts was covered with protruding snags upon which the water foamed.

Bearing steadily out to sea, without apparently paying much attention to the canoe, she passed on into deep water, and the boys saw a score of men upon the deck, managing her sails.

There were canoe clubs all along the coast, and it was no uncommon thing to see their little boats passing at all hours of the day and night, for which reason, perhaps, the smugglers did not over casually notice the Avenger.

By the time Jack's canoe reached Wrecker's Crag, a beetling mass of black, scowling rocks, the Sly Lass was a league out at sea.

"It is very likely that some of their number yet remain at their rendezvous to guard it," said Jack, "but we must enter the cavern and see what they have got stored there, at all hazards."

They turned the Avenger into a little cove, and the boy steered her for a large dark opening among the rocks, which he knew to be the cavern entrance.

Running the boat straight up to it, he brought her up in the wind, and turning a lever he started a powerful glow from the searchlight.

The reflector worked upon a pivot, and the boy turned the blazing light into the dark cavern entrance, and the interior of the place was lighted as if by day, giving the trio an uninterrupted view of it.

A huge natural cave was revealed.

It contained a table, chairs, a stove, several empty boxes and barrels, and a lot of trash, but not a soul was inside.

Jack was amazed.

"The birds have flown!" he exclaimed.

"Aye, but wot's that paper stuck up thar fer?" queried Tim.

He pointed at a sheet of white note-paper pinned to the cave entrance by a dagger which was thrust into a crevice.

The boy saw some writing upon it, and eagerly took it down, and read what was inscribed upon it.

A cry of chagrin pealed from his lips.

"By jingo!" he ejaculated. "Listen to this, will you?"

And he read aloud:

"Mr. Jack Wright:—Having been notified by one of our men that you have got away with Hunter, Redfern and Billy, we concluded not to wait for you to tackle the rest of the gang, and have skipped to baffle you. Fully aware that you would

be too much for us with one of your electric boats, as we have seen them operated, we have concluded to give up work in this section of the country, and thus avoid trouble. Yours truly,

"Dick Ford, First Mate."

"They must have seen us coming, and pretended not to!" exclaimed the boy angrily, for he hated to meet with defeat.

"Ouf yer vhas put on bower," said Fritz, "ve vhas soon over-haul 'em."

"I'll try it," said the boy. "They can't be more than five miles away from us by this time, and are not making over ten knots. Slacken your sheet lines, and lower away your hal-yards to furl sail!"

Down came the batwings, and Jack turned the Avenger around.

He ran her out of the cove under electricity, and as soon as she got her bow to the sea, they saw the Sly Lass standing away to the southward.

"Tim, keep a sharp lookout!" exclaimed the boy.

"Aye, aye," responded the old sailor:

"Fritz, furl that canvas, and——"

Crash!

It was a fearful shock.

The bow of the boat had struck a sunken rock.

In through the ragged aperture torn in the hull rushed the water, and a cry of despair pealed from Jack's lips.

"She's fillin'!" shouted Jack. "But pull down your visors, and start your air valves, for we may go down with her!"

He turned the boat around as he spoke, and ran her back for the cove.

Of all times to have such an accident happen this was certainly the worst, for they might easily have overhauled the Sly Lass.

The canoe was furnished with a pump, too, but the hole in her hull was so large that it was of no avail.

Indeed, so great and rapid was the influx of water that she soon filled up, and began to settle in the water.

Just as Jack got her within the cove, down she went, and the three friends with her, into a depth of two fathoms of water.

She landed upon the bottom among some slimy rocks and weed, and laid over upon one side, a wreck.

Encased in their metallic diving suits, which were entirely impervious to the water, Jack and his friends saw by the glare of the searchlight where they were.

Over their ears in the helmets were rubber discs with vibrators somewhat similar to those of telephones, and by their use our friends could easily speak to each other and hear each other without the aid of communicating wires, as the water acted in lieu of them.

The boy called them audiphones, as he had invented them for this special purpose, and calling to his friends he bade them help him carry the Avenger up to the open air again.

They disembarked and examined the damage.

A hole had been burst through one of the forward plates as big as a dish, raggedly, and looked as if it resulted from a burst bomb.

"That puts an end to my pursuit of the schooner!" thought Jack in disgust. "Of course the damage can easily be repaired, but in the meantime the Sly Lass will get away, and I may never find her again."

Heavy as the boat was naturally, it did not weigh much under the water, which had a tendency to buoy it up, in consequence of its shape, and getting her in the right position, the three got hold, and very easily moved her shoreward.

By this means they finally got her up to the shore, and there anchored her in pretty shoal water, as the tide was then high.

As soon as the tide ran out she would remain high and dry.

This would not occur for six hours, however.

For that reason Jack decided that they should remain at the cavern over night, posting a sentry, who could be relieved, and as there was nothing in the boat that was perishable in the water, they did not fret over any possible losses.

Following out Jack's plan, therefore, two of them turned in on the floor of the cave, divested of their diving suits.

The night passed uneventfully by, and on the following morning they found the boat lying upon the beach, when a raid was made upon her larder, the water-tight cans were opened, and they soon had a hearty breakfast, cooked by Fritz.

Jack then sent the Dutch boy back to Wrightstown on foot, to get some tools, a plate, and other things necessary to repair the boat.

Fritz returned in ample time for Jack to patch the Avenger good enough to float her back to the workshop before the tide arose again, and by ten o'clock, with the water pumped out of her, the canoe was afloat again. Our friends embarked and paddled her out of the cove.

They then raised the wet sails, to dry them out as well as to propel the boat, and in this manner returned to the village.

Running the boat up into the creek, she was returned to the workshop, and then taken from the water by Jack's workmen.

They set to work upon her again, and by nightfall she was so well repaired that an experienced eye could not have detected that she had been stove in on a rock.

The boat was returned to the water, and our friends went into the house to supper, after partaking of which they repaired to Jack's library, when a servant announced Mr. Dicer.

"It is mortifying to have to confess how our plans were frustrated," said Jack, turning crimson, "but we may as well tell him."

A moment afterward the chief was ushered in, and said briskly:

"I received your telegram stating that you captured Ralph Redfern and one of his men, and I've sent them both to New York, Wright."

"Indeed!" replied the boy.

"Yes; and having examined the six cases you sent to the Custom House, we found that they contained contraband goods. Harry Hunter was confronted with the evidence of his crime, and made a clean breast of his rascality, implicating Redfern and the steward of the steamer Southern Cross, whom we arrested."

"Then that case is almost settled?"

"We've got dead proof against all the guilty parties, and all that remains to be done is for you to capture the schooner Sly Lass. I see she has escaped you with the rest of Redfern's crew. She was reported at the Maritime Exchange as having been seen beating about Sandy Hook, and doubtless means to haunt the Jersey coast now, since you discovered their rendezvous about here."

"Ah, you know of my defeat, then?"

"Of course; that's nothing. I don't blame you—expected it, in fact. Now, I'm going back to convict the batch of prisoners you have already collected. You start off as soon as possible after the Sly Lass, and blow her out of the water if you like. You know where you can communicate any news to me."

"I'll start off to-night," said Jack.

"Good. It will save time, and give you a chance to find the smuggler all the sooner. Any more news?"

"Nothing, Mr. Dicer."

"Then I'm off for the seven o'clock train. Good-night."

And away went the chief, filled to the brim with business. Jack and his friends thereupon settled everything at the house for a protracted absence, and left.

They entered the canoe again, and having driven her out on the sea, she was turned to the southward.

"We are going to have a dangerous cruise, boys," said Jack, in prophetic tones, "for we have got desperate sea outlaws to handle, but I am determined to capture the Sly Lass and her crew if my life pays the forfeit, and I know you are with me heart and soul!"

CHAPTER VI.

A BAG OF DIAMONDS.

"Lay to, there, Tim! Stop the boat, I say, on your life!"

"Aye, aye, Jack, I see the lubber now, a-puttin' out from Staten Islan'!"

"Holy Moses, Tim, look oudt dot shib don'd run us down alretty!"

It was on the following night when these remarks passed between the three occupants of the Avenger, in the Narrows, opposite the Owl's Head.

Hard by a large, weather-beaten ship, was majestically entering the port of New York, and a rowboat containing two men, in the garb of seamen, had come out from the direction of Tompkinsville toward it.

Our friends had passed a fruitless day searching for the Sly Lass, and now lay not far from Fort Wadsworth, when they saw a blue light burn on the deck of the ship for a moment, which resulted in bringing the rowboat out from shore.

An answering signal of some kind glowed for a moment on the rowboat, and then it suddenly went out, as if plunged in the water.

To say the least, it looked suspicious.

At any rate, Jack resolved to investigate the matter.

"Tim, raise the screen," he whispered.

"Aye, then both of yer stoop a moment," replied the old sailor.

"I vhas retty," announced Fritz, dropping into the cockpit.

Tim turned a crank, and the telescopic wire deckhouse came up from the slot, and paused with a sharp click when it reached the limit of its height, forming a cage in which the three now sat.

It was as easy to see through the meshes of the wire as if it were not there, yet so strong was this canopy that a ball from a winchester, at five yards distance, could not have penetrated it.

"Tim, get out the repeating rifles, and load them!" came Jack's order.

"Bless me! Then yer 'spect trouble along o' them 'ere chaps, eh?"

"Looker dot!" said Fritz excitedly. "Dey vhas vorkin' alretty vonct."

Jack saw a man on the after deck of the ship fling a huge dark object over the taffrail, and it struck the water with a splash, but bobbed up again, and floated as buoyantly as a cork.

It was an inflated rubber bag.

"That bag is filled with something dutiable," he remarked, watching it.

"An' them 'ere fellers in ther boat is a pullin' t'wards it now," added Tim.

"Don'd yer see der name of dot shib now?" queried Fritz.

The sky was covered with flying clouds that portended a storm, which cast a dense gloom over the water, but they were near the ship now.

"I can just distinguish the name of the—let me see—the Fox," said Jack.

"Looks mighty like a Rio craft!" said Tim, carefully scrutinizing her.

"Den out she vhas from Brazil, I tink dot vhas diamonts by dot pag!"

"It is more than likely, Fritz; now, Tim, start the canoe."

The old sailor turned the lever, and the screw spun around, when away glided the canoe toward the rowboat, which by this time had reached the floating object, and Jack saw one of the men stoop over the gunwale, and fasten a hook to it at the end of a rope.

The oarsman rowed away, and the rope paid out until it became taut, when the rubber bag was towed along.

By this time the canoe arrived within fifty yards of the silent and mysterious boatmen, when Jack suddenly started the searchlight, and the electric streak shot athwart the other boat.

Both men gave utterance to startled cries, and looked up, half blinded by the glare, to see where the startling light came from.

For an instant Jack kept the light wavering upon them; then he shouted:

"Haul to, there!"

"River police!" they heard one of the men cry hoarsely.

"Give way, Dick Ford, or we are lost!" roared the other.

The oarsman began to row with all his muscle.

Jack gave a violent start of surprise upon nearing what they said.

"Ford—Dick Ford!" he muttered. "Why, that's the name of the first mate of the Sly Lass, who is now occupying the captured captain's position!"

"Och, du lieber Gott! Don't dot vhas bully!" chuckled Fritz.

"Say," whispered Tim, "why don't yer let ther skunks go, an' folly 'em? We could find out then whar they've got thar schooner."

"That's a capital plan," assented Jack. "That is, if they will lead us to it after having thrown the searchlight upon them."

"Vell, ve dry dot, anyvay," said Fritz. "Make der light oudt."

Jack shut off the electric glow.

The Narrows became wrapped in gloom again.

Still watching the dim rowboat, and keeping an even distance behind it, the boy sent his canoe following after the smugglers.

Instead of leading them toward their boat, however, the rascals pulled for a densely wooded section of the shore, probably well aware of what Jack's design was in pursuing them.

"It's of no use," said the boy. "They are too sharp for us, I'm afraid."

"Best ter overhaul them!" warned Tim.

"If vonet dey vhas got in by dem woods, goot-py, Shon!" said Fritz.

Jack foresaw that prompt action was necessary.

The rowboat was even then dangerously close to shore.

"Get your guns ready for action!" he exclaimed.

Then he turned on the searchlight, flooding their prey.

"Haul to, or we'll fire on you!" he shouted, ringingly.

"Go to blazes!" was the defiant answer of the fugitives.

A sharp, spiteful crack of a rifle pealed out with startling clearness upon the night air, and a ball struck the wire netting.

It failed to penetrate, however.

The man with the oars kept on rowing, and the other knelt in the stern sheets, firing back at our friends.

"Fritz, blow a hole in their boat," said Jack.

The Dutch boy fired.

No report followed, but the moment the bomb-like ball struck the rowboat it burst with a loud concussion, and tore several boards out.

Instantly the rowboat filled and capsized.

Both men were spilled out into the water.

"Strike out for the shore, Ford!" they heard one of them shout.

Then they both swam away.

"Let me put a shot in thar figgerheads, Jack!" begged the old sailor.

"No, don't kill them," said Jack. Then he yelled: "Stop or we'll fire!"

"Don't give in!" they heard the fugitive mate cry hoarsely.

Biff! went a shot from Tim's rifle.

It struck the water ahead of the two swimmers and burst.

They both doggedly kept on, however.

Both men were desperate.

They knew that capture meant a long term of imprisonment for them, and they seemingly preferred death to that.

Soon they reached shoal water and waded out, although the boy had put on power to overtake them, and they ran ashore.

Like an arrow the Avenger dashed up to the embankment.

Shutting off power, Jack curved his boat around, and she ran in shoal water just as the men reached the trees.

Open went a door in the netting, and, with his rifle in his hand, Jack sprang out and ran after them.

"Stop where you are, Tim!" he called back.

The old sailor turned the searchlight upon the fugitives just as they rushed into the woods, with the water dripping from their clothes.

"Stop, I say!" roared Jack. "This is your last chance."

No reply was vouchsafed.

The men kept right on, and it nettled the boy.

He aimed at one of the flying rascals and fired.

Bang! exploded the ball, and one of the men uttered a yell of pain and fell headlong to the ground.

The other one kept right on, and a moment afterwards he vanished behind a clump of bushes, while Jack ran up to his victim.

He lay groaning upon the ground, for the ball had struck him in the leg and severely wounded him.

He writhed and rolled, swore and groaned, and as the boy drew near he flung a stone at him, but missed his mark.

He was not the mate, Jack was disappointed to observe.

"You have crippled me!" he moaned in agonized tones.

"I should have aimed at your obstinate head," coolly said Jack.

"Oh, if I had a weapon I'd even this score with you!"

"As you haven't, I'll make a prisoner of you."

So saying Jack snapped a pair of handcuffs upon his wrists, and Fritz joined him a few moments afterward. They carried the wretch back to the Avenger and laid him in the cockpit.

"Where is your schooner now?" demanded Jack.

"I won't tell you!" roared the man wrathily.

"You'll feel sorry if you don't, for I'll force a confession from you."

"Go ahead, then! I won't say a blamed word!" growled the captive.

"Did his pal escape ye, lad?" queried Tim anxiously.

"He did; but drive the boat out to that rubber bag and we'll see what's in it, after which we can attend to this scoundrel's case."

Tim steered the canoe over to the capsized boat, to which the bag was still attached by the line, and Jack cut the rope and hauled the rubber bag up on the after deck.

It was quite light.

He withdrew his knife and cut it open.

There was a small wooden box inside, and he drew it out.

Bursting it open only required a few moments' work, and a cry of amazement burst from their lips when they saw its contents by the glow of the searchlight.

The box was filled with diamonds!

It was a priceless treasure, and the beautiful big gems sparkled and scintillated in the rays of the electric light with dazzling effulgence that almost made their eyes ache.

"They are worth thousands of dollars," said Jack, "and it was designed that no duty was to be paid on them, but I think I have succeeded in spoiling that little game of fraud."

CHAPTER VII.

A DISASTROUS EXPLOSION.

It was very evident to Jack that the Sly Lass was somewhere around the harbor, as Dick Ford was prowling about the Narrows, and the main point now was to locate the boat if it was possible to do so.

The gang of smugglers he was tracking evidently had a number of contracts to fill for the benefit of unprincipled people in New York, as was evinced by the cases of Hunter and the Brazilian ship, and, although Ralph Redfern was in custody, it looked as if the first mate meant to fulfill the work.

But one way remained to break the gang up, and that was to find the schooner, and capture her and her entire crew.

It seemed probable to Jack that she might be lurking around Staten Island, as Ford had just come from there, and went back there.

"Since this man refuses to confess anything," said the boy, "the best thing we can do is to make a circuit of the island, and try to find the vessel ourselves. It will be time enough later on to take him ashore with these diamonds, and turn them over to the authorities."

"Then I'll lower ther cage," said Tim. "Thar ain't no use fer it now, an' if we leaves it up, it'll attract a lot o' attention by its odd look."

"Shust led me hit dot smuckler by der het mit a baddle vonct," said Fritz, "und I tink I vhas made him shpoken a leetle alretty."

He picked up one of the paddles, and raised it menacingly over their captive, and the man suddenly lost his nerve, and yelled:

"Don't kill me! Don't kill me! I'll tell you all you want to know."

"I tink so," said Fritz, with a nod. "Now, where you got der schooner—hey?"

"We left her anchored up near St. George."

"Dot vhas besser. Vhy yer didn't set so before alretty?"

"We will see if he is lying," said Jack.

Tim had lowered the cage by this time, and Jack turned one of the levers, starting the canoe, and grasping the wheel he steered her up the Narrows, keeping her close to the shore.

It was likely that Dick Ford would return to the schooner and make an effort to get away, now that he knew that the canoe was on his track.

Propelled by her screw, the Avenger proceeded toward the bay.

There were but few vessels about at that late hour, and she soon arrived in sight of the quarantine station, when suddenly a cry of surprise burst from Jack's lips, and he pointed ahead.

"There goes the Sly Lass now, pursued by a revenue tug!" he exclaimed.

His enemy's boat had shot out into the bay under full sail, and was heading toward Bedloe's Island, pursued by a large black boat carrying the barred ensign of the Custom House at her flag staff.

It was the steamer in charge of the anchorage grounds of New York harbor, and evidently must have had orders as an incentive for pursuing the schooner in the manner it was doing.

"Dem revenue poat vhas sure to catch him," said Fritz, looking at the race with deep interest just as the clouds broke and the moon burst out for a few minutes.

"Aye, now, did yer ever see a sailin' craft go as fast as a steamer?" growled Tim. "An', wot's more, if that 'ere tug don't overhaul ther Sly Lass, ain't we here ready an' willin' ter do so fer her?"

The revenue boat was fast overhauling the schooner just then, and it seemed as if the game was all up with the smugglers, when to everybody's amazement the schooner tacked away to the portward, and rushed headlong upon the rocks and shoals off New Brighton.

It looked as if she were rushing to certain destruction near the little lighthouse, and the tug suddenly hauled to.

Her captain dared not follow the reckless crew of the schooner, for fear of wrecking or stranding his boat.

"She will soon go to pieces in there!" cried Jack grimly.

He stopped the canoe, and they all watched the headlong rush of the schooner, expecting to see her strike a rock every moment.

But no such accident happened.

Her draught was extremely light, and as it was high tide Dick Ford, who held the tiller, knew of a channel through which she might pass toward the Jersey shore in safety.

His calculation was correct, too, for, although the schooner's keel scratched and scraped along the bottom numberless times, and she stuck in one spot for a moment, her course was not checked.

"By Jove, she is escaping!" muttered Jack. "This won't do. We must continue the chase, boys, for it very evident the tug can't risk following her through that shallow, dangerous channel, and our boat can easily do it. Get out your paddles. It won't do to risk a plunge through there at the speed our wheel would urge us, for if we struck a bar or rock we would soon be out of the race."

Tim and Fritz got the paddles out, and began to work them, while Jack stood up in the bow and steered and watched.

He saw the tug bobbing up and down in the steamship channel, her crew keenly watching them.

The canoe glided along in the wake of the smuggler schooner, the Sly Lass going at twice the speed of the Avenger, and the outlaws rapidly widened the breach between them.

Her course was laid for the oily waters of Bergen Point, and she soon passed out into the deep water again and shot toward Port Richmond.

The canoe kept on steadily, but slowly, until she was over the dangerous water, and then the paddles were shipped and Jack turned the lever to put on the electric power.

There came a sudden lurch of the boat just then, and a snap.

The propellers failed to work.

"What was that?" gasped Jack, turning around.

"Sounded as if somethin's busted," replied Tim, with a scared look.

"Then hoist the sails, quick! We mustn't let those fellows get too great a lead, or they may slip through our fingers."

Tim and Fritz hastened to obey this order, and as soon as the batwings caught the breeze and the centerboard was lowered, Jack left the wheel in Tim's hands, and began to examine the machinery.

The canoe darted rapidly ahead.

Within a few moments Jack made a startling discovery.

"The screw shaft has snapped in two!" he exclaimed. "We will have to depend upon our sails and paddles until we can either have it repaired or replace it with a new one. There must have been a flaw in the steel rod."

"Oh, Lor!" groaned Tim. "Wot a onlucky thing ter happen jest this time, when we most needed that 'ere propeller!"

CHAPTER VIII.

ON BOARD OF A STEAMER.

The canoe was making excellent time, but she did not gain on the schooner any, despite Tim's skillful handling.

At first the boy imagined that Dick Ford was going to sail the schooner into Newark Bay, but he was soon undeceived when he saw her tack off the other way, following Staten Island Sound, and go racing down into Raritan Bay.

A bee line was then made for Point Comfort by the Sly Lass, and from there she headed for Sandy Hook, and made tracks for Gedney's Channel to get outside.

Jack glanced up at the sky.

The moon was veiled again, and the heavens wore a murky look.

"It is going to storm," said the boy, "and if we follow the Sly Lass far out to sea I'm afraid we will have a rough time of it."

"Yer ain't a-goin' ter give up, are ye, lad?" asked Tim anxiously.

"Why, no, I'm not afraid. The canoe can't sink again now, for you know I've had air-tight cylinders put in that would hold her afloat in the roughest kind of weather."

"Dot schooner vhas near a half a mile away now," grumbled Fritz, "und der vind vhas gittin' stronger as before alretty. She keep up all dot ganvas so's ter got away from us soon, und you seen dot ve been left in a leedle vwhile for sure."

"We can't carry full sail now," said Jack. "Take in a reef."

Tim obeyed this order, and the boy turned his searchlight upon the flying schooner again, deluging it with vivid light.

She was just turning Sandy Hook point, and the twin fire balls on the old lightship loomed up through the gloom like a demon's eyes.

She was evidently going to beat down the coast.

Jack felt uneasy.

Without his propeller it was a most hazardous undertaking to venture out in the rough water of a stormy sea in that gloom, yet his determined nature prompted him to doggedly keep on.

"I'll bring the rascal to with a shot, so he can't lead me a long chase from land!" he muttered, as the canoe turned the point.

His pneumatic guns were necessarily small, but they were very powerful, and as the Avenger glided out into the choppy waves of the open sea, he opened the breach of one of the guns, and put a copper cylinder in it, loaded with a high explosive he had compounded.

By turning a crank air was compressed into the reservoir of the gun.

He then sighted the piece, and pressed a button.

A terrible explosion followed.

The projectile unfortunately had become bent, and stuck in the bore of the gun when the shock of the released air burst the barrel!

The explosive's movement was upward, and a portion of the forward deck of the canoe was blown to pieces.

Unfortunately for Jack, he stood so near it that he could not avoid being struck by some of the fragments of flying steel.

He had on his metallic diving suit at the time, and it protected his body from injury; but the helmet was off, and a piece of the flying metal grazed his scalp, stunned him, and knocked him overboard into the heaving water.

Both Tim and Fritz were shocked by the explosion, and the searchlight electric wire was shivered to atoms when the light went out, leaving them engulfed in the darkness.

The canoe forged ahead, and Jack was left floating uncorrelated far astern, his limp body buoyed up by the air reservoir on his back!

When Jack recovered his senses, fifteen minutes afterwards, he was floating all alone in the water a short distance from the old Sandy Hook lightship.

The canoe and the schooner had disappeared in the dense gloom that overhung the sea, and a patter of raindrops and the moaning of the wind told him the storm was coming.

His head pained where the missile from the burst gun had hit, and he was very much confused over his situation, but soon recalled everything to mind that had occurred.

He strove to pierce the darkness with his glance, but could not distinguish anything but the dark outlines of the lonely ship rolling on the waves a short distance away to the left.

Then he swam toward it.

"Was the canoe blown to pieces and sunk?" he thought sadly. "Were Tim and Fritz killed? Has the Sly Lass escaped after all?"

He had no fear about himself, the knapsack easily holding him up.

But as soon as he got near the vessel he cried hoarsely:

"Help! Help! Help!"

No reply came back, for the sighing wind carried his strained voice away in another direction so that it could not have been heard.

He swam nearer to the rolling hulk.

"Help!" he shrieked again and again.

This time he was heard, for he saw a man appear upon the deck, and leaning over the bulwark he peered down in the water.

"Hello!" came a gruff but distinct call. "Who was that?"

"Down here in the water!" replied the boy.

"Hold on, and I'll fling you a rope."

The man disappeared, and a terrific gale of wind came sweeping along, drifting the boy away into the channel.

Here the outgoing tide was running swiftly along, and catching the boy it aided the wind to drift him further away from the lightship, and despite his struggles he soon found that his strength was inadequate to successfully battle against the powerful elements that seemed so bent upon his destruction.

Further and still further away he was carried, and he heard the man upon the lightship, faintly in the distance, shouting to him; but his reply was drowned by the gale.

Thunder now began to mutter in the distance, and faint streaks of lightning flashed in the stormy sky.

Above the dull splashing of the waves Jack heard a hoarse whistle coming from the direction he was drifting from.

He glanced up, and saw some lights approaching.

They shone upon a huge ocean steamship then putting out to sea, and he saw that she was coming down the channel he was in.

"If I remain here she will run me down," he thought.

Then he struck out to cross the channel.

It was hard work swimming now, the water had become so rough.

Nearer and nearer came the steamer, but he managed to get out of her course, and a small light dancing up and down close to the water arrested his attention beside the steamer.

It was a lantern in a rowboat.

He saw a man pull the boat alongside of the steamer and catch a line that was dangling over the side.

The boat was then pulled along by the steamship.

Several officers stood on the deck where the rope was fastened, and one of them lowered a ship's lantern at the end of a line half way down to the water, when a man went down the towing line and landed in the rowboat beside the oarsman.

Then the hawser was cast off.

The steamer passed on, and the rowboat was left astern rocking on the water, every movement shown by her lantern.

"They have put off their harbor pilot!" commented Jack.

He saw that his only salvation now was to attract the pilot's attention, and have them pick him up.

"Boat ahoy!" he screamed at the top of his voice.

He swam toward the skiff as best he could while shouting, for he saw the oarsman dip his blades into the seething water, as if about to row away with the pilot.

They heard his cry.

Arising with the lantern in his hand, the pilot shouted:

"Ahoy—who calls?"

"Come this way, for Heaven's sake!"

"Where are you—in the water?"

"Yes—yes!"

They rode toward him, and soon reached the boy.

"By George!" ejaculated the pilot upon seeing him. "There he is!"

"Help me up!" pleaded Jack.

Between the two men he was soon pulled from the water, and a great sigh of relief burst from his lips upon finding himself safe.

The pilot and his assistant gazed at the boy's singular costume in undisguised amazement, and then the pilot asked wonderingly:

"How did you get overboard, young fellow?"

"I was blown from my boat by an explosion, and got hit here."

"Ah! Your head is cut; but what are you doing with those things on?"

"Oh, that is a diving suit of the French pattern, and if it wasn't for the air reservoir upon the back I might have been drowned."

"It's a mighty queer looking rig—all metal?"

"Let me explain the situation," said Jack, with a smile.

And he then told who he was, what he had been doing, and all about the accident which had befallen him.

The pilot and his assistant listened attentively to his recital, and as they made no move to go ashore, Jack asked them:

"Do you intend to remain here all night on the water?"

"No," replied the pilot. "You see, I work for an English line of steamers, and just brought one of their vessels out. Another one has been sighted off Hatteras, and I expect her in at any moment. I am going to stay here long enough to meet her and bring her in. You can board her with me, and get carried into the lower bay, where she will have to lie at anchor until morning."

"That will just suit me," said Jack.

He took off his metallic suit, having a heavy blue suit beneath, and made a bundle of it to carry in his hand, and his under clothing was perfectly dry.

Drawing a piece of canvas around him, he put on a tarpaulin hat which lay in the boat, and presently the steamer they were waiting for came along and signaled the pilot.

Her engines were slowed up to permit the pilot to board her, and an accommodation ladder was let down over the side by means of which they reached her deck.

The pilot explained to the captain about Jack, and went up in the pilot-house, while Jack displayed his official badge to show his authority.

He then went into the saloon, and then down the handsome staircase into the lower saloon, where he found a large number of passengers making preparations for landing.

All the bustle and confusion attendant upon a steamship nearing the port of destination were to be seen upon every land.

Officers were darting here and there, waiters were work-

ing at the baggage, a murmur of continual conversation was going on, and every one wore a nervous, expectant look.

Jack smiled when he observed it.

He knew very well what it portended.

"Not one person in a hundred who goes abroad fails to bring back something that is dutiable," he muttered, "and the grand question arises how to pass them through the Custom House officers' search without paying duty. I'll bet that nearly every passenger on this steamer is devising a means of smuggling some coveted possession!"

They all knew that as soon as the steamer dropped anchor in the bay a Custom House boat was likely to run alongside, and a dozen officers would come aboard to guard the baggage and have them declare what they had of a dutiable character.

It was a matter of amusement for Jack to go among them, and hear the various plots and plans they confided to each other of a minor nature, and he carefully took note of everything they said.

There is a peculiarity about this style of petty smuggling frequently witnessed by the writer; before a steamer is about to enter port confidences are so openly exchanged that nearly every passenger knows what the other intends to try to smuggle.

Non-professionals become so nervous with anticipation and anxiety that they most glaringly give themselves away, and it does not take a very experienced officer to detect a guilty looking person.

The boat reached the anchorage grounds, and Jack made his way aft on the saloon deck, and peered over at the tug that was approaching. It was the same one that lost the Sly Lass.

As she ran alongside, the boy heard a stealthy footfall behind him, and although the darkness at the after deck was so dense he could not see through it, he distinctly heard two men coming down the after companionway from the upper deck, speaking in whispers.

"What does this mean?" thought the boy, and he remained as quiet as a mouse.

"Can you see the shore line of Staten Island?" queried one of the strangers.

"Yes; it is not half a mile away," replied the other.

"I think I can very easily swim it. Got the rope?"

"Yes. I'll tie it to a stanchion here, and you can quietly slide down into the water, and get away. Make haste, for the boarding officers are nearly all on board now, and we may be discovered."

"Treachery!" muttered Jack, eagerly listening to them.

CHAPTER IX.

LAI D UP FOR REPAIRS.

That the two men evidently had something they designed to smuggle was apparent to Jack, and he felt a strong inclination to seize them.

But he restrained his impatience, and heard them tie a rope to the stanchion and drop an end over the stern bulwark.

Then the one who planned to swim ashore went up on the bulwark.

Jack seized the knob of a door leading into the stateroom corridor and flung it open, when out gushed a flood of light.

The two men gave utterance to cries of alarm, and looked around.

They saw Jack aiming a revolver at them, which he had drawn from his hip pocket, and the man on the bulwark shouted:

"We are discovered!"

"Gentlemen, you are my prisoners!" said Jack coolly.

"Oh, Lord!" gasped the other man.

"Come down here!" he exclaimed imperatively.

"What right have you got to interfere with us, young fellow?"

For reply Jack displayed his badge of authority.

That was enough.

The man on the bulwark slid over, and began to descend to the water, when suddenly a broad glare of light shot up from the bay upon him, and Jack uttered a cry of surprise when he saw that the light came from the Avenger.

The canoe was sailing toward the steamer under reefed sails, with her searchlight wire repaired, and Tim at the wheel.

In the bottom of the boat lay the handcuffed prisoner who had been with Dick Ford when the bag containing the box of diamonds then aboard the Avenger was being smuggled from the ship Fox.

Fritz sat in the stern-sheets, and Jack saw that the upper part of the deck was in a shattered condition from the exploded pneumatic gun.

"Tim!" shouted the boy. "Stop this man's escape!"

By the glare of the searchlight the old sailor saw who addressed him.

"It's Jack!" he roared. "Fritz, ye lubber, the lad's aboard o' that steamer."

"Och, I tort he vhas det!" replied Fritz.

The man on the rope now dropped down into the water, and started to swim over to the Staten Island shore, when Tim steered the boat after him.

At the same moment Jack cried to the man he was confronting:

"Hands up, you scoundrel, or I shall fire!"

"Yes, yes! Don't shoot!" cried the would-be smuggler, complying.

"Now march into the saloon."

"Lower your pistol. It may accidentally go off."

"Do as I tell you, and mind your business."

"What are you going to do to me?"

"Put you in the officers' hands!"

The man groaned, and Jack marched him into the corridor, when one of the boarding officers approached them in surprise.

"Hello, there!" he cried. "What's the meaning of this scene?"

"I've got a smuggler for you," answered Jack.

"Explain yourself."

Jack did so, and the officer handcuffed the prisoner.

"I'm going to lock him up aboard the tug," said he.

And he took the terrified prisoner away.

Jack returned to the stern of the steamship again, and there he saw the Avenger standing, Fritz holding the escaping man up with a rifle so that he could swim no further.

The stranger made an effort to get rid of a package he had, no doubt what he was trying to smuggle, but the Dutch boy was too quick for him.

Seizing the man by the hair, Fritz pulled him aboard of his boat, and wrested the parcel from his hands.

A struggle took place between them, but as soon as Tim went to the Dutch boy's assistance the man was made helpless.

"What'll we do wi' him, Jack?" shouted the old sailor.

"Put both of them aboard of the tug," replied Jack.

"Ain't yer a-comin' aboard?"

"I'll meet you on the tug."

The old sailor sent the Avenger over to the revenue boat, and Jack passed along the gangway and went aboard of her.

There he met the chief officer in charge of the other prisoner, and having explained matters to the man, they took the

two captives from Jack's boat, along with the bundle and box of diamonds.

Having imprisoned the smugglers, the officer took charge of the proofs of their guilt, and promised to bring them to the Barge Office the next day and settle the cases for Jack.

The boy then boarded the canoe, and explained to his friends what happened to him, after which he drove the canoe up through the bay to the East River, and brought her to a shipyard.

Here she was tied up, and leaving Tim and Fritz to turn into their hammocks aboard of her, Jack crossed from Brooklyn to New York, and made his way to a hotel.

He turned in and slept till daylight; then he went down to the steamship's dock, where he arrived just as the steamer hauled in.

On the way up from the bay the passengers had made their declarations, and as soon as the gang-plank was hove they came ashore, and the waiters and porters began to transfer their baggage to the dock for inspection.

"I'll spring a surprise upon the petty smugglers!" thought Jack, with a quiet smile, as the inspectors came ashore.

He drew them all aside, and gave them full information of every one who had planned to swindle the government.

As soon as the officers began to examine the baggage a scene of the most intense excitement followed.

Every one who had made an attempt to avoid the revenue by smuggling was baffled in their plans.

Jewels were cut from the waist-bands of clothing, bric-a-brac was taken from cunningly devised false bottoms of trunks, very stout-looking ladies were found to be obese from having all kinds of articles stowed away about their persons, and one individual had hidden a dutiable article in a cake of soap.

There were a score of the most sly plans resorted to, in order to conceal from the lynx-eyed inspectors different things that were afterwards confiscated and carried to the seizure rooms of the Custom House.

Every one was crestfallen upon being discovered. Everybody was puzzled to account for their acute plots being so easily exposed, and yet not one of the petty law breakers suspected the handsome boy who went among them being the author of their chagrin.

"It's a pity you cannot always be with us," said the chief inspector to Jack, when the examination was almost completed. "You have, in the aggregate, saved the Government hundreds of dollars in duties on this trip by exposing the rascality of these people, for none of us would have known anything about these tricks if you hadn't shown them up to us."

Jack laughed and took his departure.

The boy then went to the Custom House and found Mr. Dicer in the office of the collector of the port.

Here he learned that his affidavit was wanted to prosecute Hunter, Redfern, Billy and the three other prisoners, and he gave it, so that the trial of the smugglers could go on without his presence.

The collector complimented Jack upon the speedy work he had done.

"You have broken up Redfern's rendezvous near Wrightstown," said the collector, "and that will put an end to the glaring rascality done in that section of the seaboard. I wish, however, that you could capture the schooner Sly Lass, for she has given us a good deal of trouble."

"Have you heard her spoken of to-day, sir?"

"She was reported off the island this morning. If you want to find her you must look along the Long Island coast."

"My canoe is at the shipyard undergoing repairs," said Jack, "and I expect that she will be ready for use to-day. As soon as I can get her into commission, I shall start off in quest

of Dick Ford, as he is evidently carrying out all of Redfern's work."

The boy soon afterwards left the collector's office, crossed the river, and making his way to the shipyard, he found that Tim and Fritz had hurried the repairs along so briskly that the Avenger was almost ready for service again.

As the shaft was of an ordinary pattern, a duplicate had easily been put in, and the forward deck was repaired.

The gun ports on either quarter were now closed up, and the remaining gun was mounted with its muzzle protruding like a bowsprit through the stem of the canoe.

Jack adjusted all the electrical connections himself, and found that the batteries were well charged yet, and needed no attention.

Everything was finished that night, and getting aboard of the canoe, Jack started her down toward Governor's Island under electricity.

She worked as well as ever now, and passing Fort Hamilton she ran out to Coney Island Point.

The storm had all passed away, and a cool breeze was blowing, while the sky was clear and starry as could be desired.

Several sails dotted the southern horizon, and Jack viewed them through his glass long and earnestly.

There was one in particular that attracted his attention. She was a bark, and stood alone up the coast of Fire Island. Jack intently viewed her, and gave a slight start.

"By jingo!" he exclaimed.

"Vot's der matter?" quickly asked Fritz.

"Do you see that bark?"

"Yah."

"Well, there's trouble aboard her. Steer the Avenger that way, Tim."

"Aye, aye, sir," replied the old sailor, and he obeyed.

CHAPTER X.

MUTINY OF THE MAY BUG.

Away darted the canoe with celerity, and within a short space of time she reached a point within ten yards of the bark.

Several pistol shots were heard coming from her deck, and Jack observed that her jibs were lowered, there was no one at the wheel, and she swung idly up in the wind.

Upon her deck a dozen sailors were standing amidships forward, while athwart the boat a barricade of boxes, water-casks, chicken-coops and other things had been raised.

The men were, talking, swearing and shouting excitedly, and every one of them was armed with rifles, pistols, knives, capstan-bars and belaying-pins in a most formidable manner.

It was very evident that a fight of some kind was going on.

Jack and his friends were putting on their metallic suits, leaving the visors of their helmets open, and arming themselves.

Standing up in the bow of the canoe, the boy shouted:

"Bark ahoy!"

The men all looked over at him.

"Veer off there!" gruffly ordered one of them, with a red mustache and florid face.

"What's the matter with you fellows?" demanded Jack.

"None o' your business!" was the sour reply.

"Then I shall go aboard and find out."

"It's as much as your life is worth to meddle with us, young feller!"

Just then a pistol shot pealed out from the cabin window

aft, and one of the men uttered a yell, flung up his arms, and fell to the deck with a wound in his body, while he raved and blasphemed horribly.

"Dan's shot!" shouted one of the men frantically.

"Storm the cabin an' burst open the door!" yelled another.

"Kill the obstinate cusses!" suggested the third.

"Charge on 'em!" yelled the red-mustached man.

He seemed to be looked upon as a leader of the men, and Jack gathered from their talk that he was the second mate of the May Bug, as the bark was named.

In fact, he was the first man to leap over the barricade, brandishing an ax in his hands and shouting to the men to follow him. They all went tumbling across the deck, to all appearances half drunk.

A wild chorus of yells pealed from their lips, and several shots pealed rapidly from the cabin windows, a few of them striking the men and dropping two of them.

The mate was a giant in size and strength.

He reached the cabin door half blinded by the sanguinary fluid that poured down over his face from a wound upon his forehead, and his temper was aroused to the highest pitch.

Raising his ax he rained a shower of powerful blows upon the door, splintering the wood and shattering the panels.

Bang! Bang!

Bang! Bang! went several shots from his followers.

They took effect in the woodwork, riddling it, and were answered by a rapid volley from within the cabin.

It was very evident that the desperate men were striving to get into the cabin at some one who had taken refuge there.

"To the rescue!" exclaimed Jack, vehemently.

"Wot in thunder do this mean, lad?" queried Tim.

"I don'd vunder ven dot vhas some birates," suggested Fritz.

"No, you are wrong. It must be mutiny. Don't you see that the assault is made upon the captain's cabin? It is fair to presume that the chief officer is locked up there resisting them."

The Avenger glided up to the bark, and Tim made her fast by a line to the martingale shrouds, when up to the deck clambered Jack and Fritz as fast as they could go.

By the time they reached it they found the whole crew crowded in front of the half-battered-down door, upon which the second mate was thundering blow after blow with his ax, while the men were shattering the windows with their capstan-bars.

Rushing across the deck, Jack and Fritz sprang upon the barricade, and leveling their electric pistols at the yelling horde, the boy shouted in stern, ringing tones:

"Stop! or I'll fire upon you all!"

"Ha! They've boarded us!" shouted the leader of the riotous crowd.

"Will you obey me or not?"

"No! Fire upon them, boys!"

Every firearm in the crowd was aimed at the two, and the next moment a volley was fired at Jack and Fritz.

With loud, metallic jingles the balls struck their suits, but went no further, and did no harm.

Like two brazen statues the young rescuers stood there, perfectly invulnerable and indifferent to the deadly pellets of lead.

"Fire, Fritz!" came Jack's order.

They both discharged their weapons.

Swiftly the fearful messengers shot at the frenzied crowd and burst.

The reports were loud, and the effect was fatal.

Several of the men staggered and fell.

"Help! Help!" cried a smothered voice within the cabin.

"What is the trouble here?" answered Jack.

"Mutiny of my crew!"

"Just as I suspected."

"They have murdered the first mate for standing by me."

"Ah! That settles it, Fritz. Fire again!"

"Mit pleasure," replied the Dutch boy, complying.

Two more explosive balls burst among the murderous mutineers.

Panic stricken, as the deadly bullets burst and wounded them, they scattered and rushed off at either side, yelling with fear.

"Throw down your arms!" shouted Jack.

"Don't you do it!" bellowed their leader.

"Every one who disobeys me dies!"

"Go for 'em again, boys! Don't stand there quietly and get shot."

As the mutinous mate thus incited his men on, he showed them an example by rushing toward Jack with his ax upheld, and the boy aimed his pistol at the rascal's head.

He pulled the trigger.

But the weapon missed fire!

Ere he could fire another shot the mate reached him, and swinging the ax around his head, he aimed a terrific blow at Jack.

Around swept the keen blade of the ax, and Jack started back.

The boy had nothing to tread on in the rear, and fell with a crash to the deck in back of the barricade, where his weapon fell from his hand and rolled out of his reach.

Fritz could do nothing for him.

He had been attacked by the rest of the crew, and was holding them at bay with his pistol by firing among them.

With a panther-like leap the mate cleared the barricade and alighted beside Jack, who was just in the act of rising.

Knocking the boy flat upon his back again with a kick, the infuriated mate planted a foot upon the young inventor's bosom, and raising the ax over his head with both hands, he prepared to deal the boy a blow that would cleave his head in two.

Glancing up, the boy observed his danger.

A shudder of horror passed over him, and with a groan he closed his eyes, for it seemed as if no mortal power could stay that blow.

There was a terrible look of cruel exultation upon the mate's florid face, and a demoniacal glare in his baleful eyes as he strained every muscle for a blow that would almost have split an iron bombshell in two.

"Fritz!" gasped the boy.

His cry for help came too late.

The merciless ax was descending.

In one second it would deal the fatal cut.

But it was not destined to occur.

Ping! came a sibilant hiss and thud.

"My God!" groaned the mate, tumbling forward.

And bang! burst a bullet within his body, killing him instantly.

Crash! sounded the ax, as, forced by the impetus of the blow, its keen edge kept descending, but the shock given the man diverged its course, and, grazing Jack's helmet, it struck—into the deck.

Down went the mate like a log, and rolling over and over, he landed in the lee scuppers upon his face, a corpse.

Tim had fired the lucky shot.

Having climbed up to the deck of the bark after his two friends, he had witnessed Jack's danger just in time to save him.

"Hurroar!" he roared.

"Saved!" gasped Jack, bounding to his feet.

"Heave inter ther lubbers, lads!" howled Tim, and he came stamping across the deck, rolling his solitary eye, and firing his pistol at the rest of the crew, who were besetting Fritz.

Jack—armed with another pistol, and he and Tim joined

the Dutch boy, when a rapid fusilade was poured into the remaining mutineers, not one of whom escaped a wound.

Down they fell like ten pins, and in a remarkably short space of time not a man of the entire gang was left standing.

Jack picked up a ball of marline.

"Bind every one of the rascals!" he exclaimed.

Tim and Fritz set to work upon them with a will, and Jack strode over to the cabin and cried cheerily:

"Captain! Open the door. You are safe now."

No answer was vouchsafed.

Jack called again, but got no reply.

Then he went to one of the windows, and a cry of consternation pealed from his lips over the harrowing sight presented to his view.

CHAPTER XI.

TO THE RESCUE OF A GIRL.

Upon the floor lay a sailor with starting eyes and fallen jaw, a ghastly bullet hole in his white forehead.

He was dead.

The captain had fallen back in a chair.

He had a revolver clutched in his hand, and was gashed by a dozen wounds, and was entirely unconscious.

Jack climbed in through the window and, unfastened the door.

He then examined the two bodies, and seeing in what condition they were, he used every means to restore the captain.

His efforts were crowned with success presently.

It was some time, however, before the unfortunate officer came to a realization of what had transpired.

Then he pressed his trembling hands to his throbbing head, and groaned in tones of intense anguish.

"Pitiful heaven, what carnage, destruction and misery!"

"Cheer up, Captain," kindly said Jack. "It is all over now."

"You renew my courage. What have you done?" he asked, looking up.

"The bark is in my possession—the mutineers my prisoners."

"Indeed, I am thankful to hear that, young man."

"What was the cause of this mutiny?"

"The crew became unruly and disobeyed my orders, and I attempted to punish the second mate, who thereupon aimed his pistol at me. Just as he fired, poor Charley Brooks, lying there, sprang between us to stop him. His fidelity cost him his life. The fatal shot was fired, and the ball lodged in his heart instead of mine."

"He was a brave officer."

"Aye, there were none more gallant. Upon killing him, the second mate summoned the crew, and foreseeing that they meant to seize the bark, I locked myself in here. They opened a cask of liquor in the freight, and all soon became madmen under its influence. Then they attacked me, and I kept them at bay as best I could until you just came to my help. Now I am badly wounded."

"The second mate has met his deserts," said Jack solemnly.

"How—have you made a prisoner of him?"

"He lies in the lee scuppers with a bullet in his body."

"Revenge! It is a just retribution which has overtaken him."

"And the rest of your crew are more or less wounded, bound hand and foot, and are in the power of my friends," continued Jack.

"What is to become of me now?"

"Where were you bound for?"

"New York. We hail from New Brunswick."

"Have no fears. We shall get you safely back to port."

"Aye, but I'm so badly wounded I can't budge an inch."

"Then we will tow your vessel into port," said Jack smilingly.

He stripped the wounded man, bound up his wounds, and calling Tim and Fritz in, they laid him in his bunk.

The three then went out on deck, and furling the sails they lashed the wheel amidships.

The old sailor and the Dutch boy had all the mutinous crew bound, and standing them up in two rows, a line at either bulwark, they lashed them fast there.

A long, towing hawser was then made fast to a ringbolt, at the stern sheets of the canoe, and the other end was made fast to the bow of the May Bug.

They then embarked in the Avenger, and putting on power, started the canoe, dragging the bark after them.

Within a few hours they got back into the harbor, carried the boat up to her berth, and tied her up.

Fritz then went ashore and summoned the police.

Reporting the case to them, ambulances were called, and the wounded captain and his crew were carried to the hospital. the ship's agents were apprised of the occurrence, and our friends returned to the Avenger, and put out to sea again.

They spent several days beating about in search of the Sly Lass, scouring the coast from New York to Maine, and yet saw no signs of her, although the utmost vigilance was maintained.

At the end of the sixth day they were at the head of the Sound, below Martha's Vineyard, with Fritz at the wheel, and a clear sky overhead.

"The smugglers' schooner must be in hiding somewhere," said Jack. "Not a person of whom we inquired has seen any trace of her after she was last seen off Fire Island, and it is my opinion that the rascals mean to keep shady until this affair blows over."

"Aye, lad, an' as thar's so many places wot jist suits thar needs along ther coast, 'tain't werry likely as which we'll find 'em ontill they shows thar ugly mugs," said Tim. "I reckon as we might veer off down ther Sound'ard side o' Long Islan', an do better."

"I tink so neider," added Fritz, "but shust der same, noting vhas more likelier as dot ve don't found dos vellers again alretty, by any blace, Shack. Ve orter go our hets to soak on accound dot ve caught 'em sooner vonct. I vhas disabboinded my mineselluf somedimes."

"'Tain't no use despairin', lad," said Tim, to cheer their despondent feelings. "Wot's a leetle disappointment like this 'ere, ter wot I once suffered at ther time I wuz shipwrecked, nigh on ter ten years ago? Nuthin'! Why, jest think o' me hangin' on to a chicken-coop thirty-two days, wi' not a morsel o' food, an' not a drop ter drink, ther wind a-blowin' great guns, an' ther storm a-ragin' all the time without a-stoppin'."

"Dirty-two days?" growled Fritz, with a suspicious look.

"Aye, lad! An' it drove me close ter wot I took, in ther gloom, fer land. Every time I wuz carried t'wards it, an' thought I wuz a-goin' ter git flung ashore, ther undertow carried me back again inter deep water. At ther end o' ther fifty-third day——"

"I thought you said thirty-two days?" interposed Jack, with a grin.

"Aye, now, so I did!" confessed Tim, not at all abashed. "I made a mistake, 'cause I ain't much at figgerin', yer know. Anyway, when I did get flung on wot I thought wuz a good-sized islan' in ther sea, wot should ther islan' do but sink, an' leave me a-floatin' agin, hangin' onter ther water-cask——"

"Och, yer shust set it vhas a shickens-coop," growled Fritz.

"Did I? Lor' bless yer, so I did. Howsoever, thar I wuz a swimmin' yet, an' would yer b'lieve it, that 'ere islan' turned out ter be a South Sea turtle, an' if it hadn't been fer a passin' ship a-pickin' me up, I'd a-been——"

"In dot durdle's belly," said Fritz in disgust.

"Wot! Don't yer b'lieve wot I'm a-tellin' yer?" asked Tim, in injured tones.

Before Fritz could tell him he didn't, Jack suddenly exclaimed:

"Look there! By Jove! What's the matter with that fellow?"

He was pointing off toward the Long Island shore, and looking in the direction indicated, Fritz and Tim beheld a young man in a skiff, putting out toward them, gesticulating wildly.

It was very evident that he was frantically trying to attract their attention, and Fritz turned to Jack and asked:

"Vill I steer toward him, Shack?"

"Yes. Let us find out what he wants," the boy replied.

He sharply scrutinized the stranger, and saw that he was to all appearance a well-dressed young man in a stylish suit and derby, a slight mustache on his lip, and his skiff a pleasure boat.

"Hey!" he yelled at the top of his voice. "Come this way. Help! Help!"

Fritz sent the canoe flying over to him, and running her up in the wind a short distance from his boat, Jack demanded:

"What's the matter with you, stranger?"

"For Heaven's sake, help me!" implored the young man.

"What do you want us to do?"

"Do you see that cove over there?"

"Yes, plainly."

"Well, I rowed in there with my sister, when we were attacked by a tough-looking trio of men, who wanted to rob us. Seeing you, I left poor Jenny in their clutches, as I was unable to cope with them single-handed, and rowed out here to ask you to help me."

The chivalrous blood in Jack's veins became fired at once by this announcement, for he saw that the stranger was telling the truth, and he replied:

"Come aboard of my boat, and make your skiff fast astern. We will do all we can to help you."

Eagerly and quickly the young man obeyed, and Fritz started the canoe for the opening indicated in the headland.

"We are boarding a couple of miles from here, up the shore," explained the young man. "My name is Walter Jerome. As we very frequently went out rowing in safety, we never expected such an attack as this."

"Were there only three men?" queried Jack.

"That's all I saw; but there may have been more on the boat."

"What boat?"

"A schooner in the cove, hidden by those trees."

"A schooner?"

"Yes. That's what aroused our curiosity and brought us in to see it."

"Did you observe what sort of a boat it was?"

"Nothing more than the name. It was an odd one—the Sly Lass——"

Each one of the three gave utterance to cries of astonishment.

"Jist ther craft as we wuz a-searchin' fer!" chuckled Tim, pounding his wooden leg upon the floor, as he fastened the stony glare of his glass eye on Walter Jerome.

"So long dot ve vhas goin' ter haf a fight," said Fritz, in delighted tones, "I tink ve vhas petter got everyding retty for id, sooner."

"These ruffians are enemies of yours, then?" said Jerome, in surprise.

"Smugglers," answered Jack, "and judging by what you say they must add any other crime to that one which might suit their convenience."

Our friends made hasty preparations for the fight they expected, and by the time they had on their metal suits and

loaded their weapons the Avenger reached the mouth of the cove and dashed in.

Down came the sails, up went the cage top, and glancing around a bend in the shore our friends saw the smugglers' schooner.

CHAPTER XII.

TURNING THE TABLES.

The cove into which the Avenger ran lay between Sag Harbor and Montauk Point, directly opposite Gardiner's Island, where it is said Captain Kidd once buried his treasure.

It was a small, land-locked sheet of water, with a sandy shore and a grove of trees which had hitherto hidden the Sly Lass from view.

She lay close to the shore at anchor, and as the canoe was run into the cove, Jack saw a number of men on her deck and heard a female shrieking for help.

It was doubtless Jenny Jerome, and her distressed cries made her brother Walter shiver, and nervously start to his feet.

"By heavens, they are abusing her!" he gasped, his face pallid, and his blue eyes glittering. "Let me get into my boat and go ahead. I'll kill those scoundrels—I'll——"

He seized the painter of his boat, which was towing astern, but Jack restrained him, and said:

"Wait. They would kill you."

The shadows of twilight were falling by this time.

"I tink dis vhas where dot Sly Lass vhas hidden herself all dose six days vot ve been looked for her alretty," said Fritz.

Just then a shout from the crew of the smuggler attested to the fact that they had seen the approach of the Avenger.

At the same moment Jack observed that they had a struggling girl in their midst whom they hustled at once into the cabin aft, and then a gang of them rushed to the bulwarks, armed with various kinds of weapons, and opened fire upon our friends.

Walter Jerome wore no suit of mail, but the wire canopy screened him as well as if he did, and armed with a repeating rifle, he stationed himself at one of the loop-holes in the top.

"Look out you don't hit my sister?" he exclaimed.

The three friends nodded and began to return the smugglers' fire.

No preliminaries were exchanged, for both parties knew each other, and were aware of one another's intentions.

The canoe now lay but fifty yards from the schooner, and while the exchange of shots took place between them the smugglers screened themselves behind their bulwarks.

The explosions that followed every shot fired from Jack's weapons created fearful havoc with the schooner's wood-work.

Great holes were torn in the planking, and many of the ropes of the rigging and parts of the deckworks were shot away.

The rain of bullets from the schooner did no harm to our friends, however, as they were flattened against the wire canopy.

Half an hour passed by.

In that time none of our friends were injured.

On the other hand, several of the smugglers were wounded in spite of the protection they had behind their bulwarks, and Jack heard the clinking of the capstan.

"They are raising their anchor!" he exclaimed.

"Aye! Then they means ter tack out o' here," said Tim.

"Oh, don't let them escape," implored young Jerome in

tones of agonized fear. "What will become of poor Jenny, if they do?"

"Don't alarm yourself," replied Jack cheerily.

"Vy yer don'd fire der gun at dem?" grumbled Fritz.

"No. A shot would blow her up."

"Vell, ain't dot vot ve vant?"

"You forget that Miss Jerome would perish, if I do so."

"Och, dot vhas so."

"We can, however, make an effort to rescue her."

"By all means," eagerly said Walter Jerome.

"Wot's yer plan, lad?" queried Tim.

"There's no way to do as I suggest, except to board the schooner."

"Aye, aye! Board her it is, then."

"Fritz, run the Avenger up to her."

"Yah!" assented the Dutch boy, complying by using the propeller.

As soon as the canoe glided alongside of the schooner Jack opened the door in the canopy. The three friends passed out on the forward deck, and made her fast with cup-suckers of the boy's invention, attached to cable lines.

To their amazement not a shot was fired at them.

The smugglers had retreated across the deck, where they stood whispering together, with their leader, Dick Ford, the mate.

He was a smooth-shaved individual of forty, tall, thin, and attired in the costume of an ordinary seaman.

Walter Jerome was left aboard of the canoe.

As soon as Jack and his friends reached the deck, they stood in a bunch, presenting a strange spectacle in their diving suits.

The boy glanced keenly at the smugglers.

"Dick Ford," he exclaimed threateningly, "you have carried your rascality too far. It is time for you to stop. I am working in the revenue service, and have been detailed to capture you and your crew dead or alive. Surrender peacefully, and you will avoid trouble—resist, and it will be the worse for you."

"We don't intend to go to jail!" growled the mate.

"There is no avoiding it. I have got Ralph Redfern, your captain, and I am determined to have the rest of you as well."

"You will have to take us by force, then," defiantly replied the man.

"Very well. Get ready, boys—aim!"

"Now!" hissed Ford, just as Jack and his friends raised their rifles.

The whole crowd scattered and rushed toward the three friends from all directions with a large seine net.

They gave it a fling, and it shot over their heads.

Jack and his companions had just fired, when the net fell over them like a cloud, and they became entangled in its meshes.

The smugglers scooped them into it so rapidly that they were jerked from their feet and flung to the deck, where they were held.

Three of the sea outlaws received the shots fired at them, but in their desperation the crew expected some one to get hurt, and each one of them was willing to risk falling victims in order to render our friends helpless.

They all had such records in police registers that it was a matter of life and liberty with them to avoid capture.

Entangled in the folds of the net, Jack and his friends were rendered helpless for the space of a moment, and in that brief time the whole crew fell upon them.

The net had come upon them so unexpectedly that they were not prepared to avoid it when they were caught.

Before they could raise a hand to defend themselves they were overpowered by the superior number of their assailants,

and with all the dexterity of sailors their captors bound them hand and foot, so they could not budge an inch.

Everything was done so rapidly and methodically that Jack could not help realizing it was the result of a preconcerted plan.

No sooner were the three made prisoners, when the crew of the *Sly Lass* attacked Jerome in the canoe, and forcing an entrance, despite the disastrous fire he met them with, they made him a prisoner, too, after a struggle.

Jack was fearfully chagrined.

He and his friends all captives, and his boat in the hands of his enemies, the outlook was excessively desperate.

The boy had no doubt of their fate.

Having injured the reckless smugglers, it was very evident they would seek a dreadful vengeance in retaliation.

No sooner had they overwhelmed Jerome, when they uttered a hoarse cheer of victory.

On account of the extreme isolation of the spot at which the fight occurred, they had not the least fear of the gun shots and other noises attracting the attention of any one who would interfere with them in what they had been doing.

With an ugly scowl on his brow, Dick Ford approached the boy.

"You did not carry out your boast, did you?" he sneered.

"The fortunes of war were against me," said Jack, in mortified tones.

"And you all shall pay dearly for attacking us."

"We were doing our duty."

"Duty be blowed!"

"What do you intend to do to us?"

"In the first place, thwart your giving evidence in court to convict Redfern."

Jack smiled disdainfully at this remark.

"You are foiled in that attempt," said he coolly.

"How do you mean?" growled Ford savagely.

"Why, I don't mean to appear in court against him at all."

"Why not?"

"Because I took the precaution to make a sworn affidavit that will convict him just as well as my verbal evidence could do before I left port, in anticipation of some such a thing as this happening."

"You did?" burst furiously from the chagrined mate's lips.

"Of course I did," laughed Jack.

A fearful expletive burst from Ford, and Jack saw an ugly scowl mantle the brow of every man who heard him.

A murmur of enraged comments ran from mouth to mouth, and with his eyes glowing like those of a wild beast, Ford hissed:

"By heavens, this is too bad, too bad!"

"I hope you won't gloat for nothing now," said Jack sharply.

"Yes, I will! If that is the case I can avenge him, as you and your accursed friends will soon allow, for, by the arch fiend, I swear that before the dawn of day I'll hang you all at a yard-arm! Do you hear me?"

"I hear you," coolly replied Jack, "but you don't frighten us a bit."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PIRATE'S TREASURE.

Dick Ford left Jack and his friends lying in the scuppers, bound hand and foot, Walter Jerome moved to tears over the fate of his sister Jenny who was locked in the cabin of the *Sly Lass*.

The smugglers then boarded the *Avenger*, and closely examined everything about the singular canoe.

They then detached the cup-suckers, and let her drift astern of the schooner, with Jerome's handsome skiff towing astern.

The twilight deepened into night, and with her anchor dropped again, the schooner remained in the cove hidden by the trees.

Straight out from the cove entrance stood Gardiner's Island in the Sound, and an occasional boat passed slowly by.

"He swears to hang us before morning at his yard-arm," said Jack, when the smugglers went away, to carry their wounded friends down in the forecabin. "We are in hard luck. If they hadn't flung that net over us, the rascals wouldn't have had such an easy victory."

"Och, dey vhas mat begause ve vhas fixed Redfern und der rest ashore," said Fritz. "I don'd vished yer vhas dolt dem apoud dat, Shack."

"Blast thar figgerheads," growled Tim. "If they'll take this 'ere metal suit off, an' gimme a club, I'll fight 'em all single handed."

"Can't any of you suggest some means of escape?" queried Jerome, in an eager whisper. "They are such desperate villains they are bound to kill us as they planned, unless we get away."

"I don't see how we are going to loosen these bonds to do it," said Jack. "If that could be accomplished, something might be done."

He glanced around as he spoke, and saw that the smugglers had divided their watch, half of them going below to turn in.

The rest remained on deck, and took turns all night long at watching the prisoners.

Even had the chance occurred for any of them to have gained his freedom, it is doubtful if anything could have been done without the smugglers detecting them in the act.

Dick Ford came out on deck.

One of the men had gone away the night previous upon a secret errand in one of the quarter boats, and he came rowing into the cove a few moments after the mate came on deck.

"Here comes Briggs!" exclaimed one of the men.

"I wouldn't have stayed here over night if he hadn't gone," said Ford grumblingly. "I suppose he went to Gardiner's Island on a wild goose chase, anyway. I didn't have much faith in the paper we found in the girl's pocket."

Walter Jerome uttered a stifled cry.

"Our secret is out!" he muttered.

"What's the matter now?" queried Jack curiously.

"Matter enough," replied Jerome. "We're going to lose a fortune!"

"I don't grasp your meaning."

"What do you suppose my sister and I were rowing about this lonely vicinity for—just the pleasure of the thing?"

"How do I know? Some people have queer notions."

"Well, we wasn't. We were treasure seeking."

"Indeed! And did you find what you were looking for?"

"The smugglers didn't give us a chance. They caught Jenny and I before we could finish the expedition we set out on."

"That's unfortunate. Why didn't you explain it before to me?"

"I didn't have a chance, and feared the smugglers overhearing what I said; but it seems that they made the very discovery I was most anxious to keep from them. Did you ever hear of Captain Kidd?"

"Of course," assented Jack.

"Know his history?"

"Such only as history relates."

"Then you are aware that the great pirate hid some of his wealth on Gardiner's Island over there?"

"That is what I have heard," replied Jack. "What of it?"

"My sister and I knew where the treasure was hidden, and our object in prowling about here was to find the spot, and then take proper measures to carry away the treasure."

"How came you to possess this wonderful secret?"

"In a curious manner. One of my ancestors purchased the library owned by the pirate's wife. The old volumes eventually fell into my hands. It is not probable that the books were read much, else the discovery I made would have come to light years ago."

"Well, what was it?" queried Jack, as he paused.

"One day I was looking through the old books, when from between the leaves of one of them there fell an old, age-stained piece of note paper, upon which there was some writing, very much blurred and faded. I managed to read a portion of it, and, to my amazement, I found it to be a very valuable document, for it explained the precise location of Captain Kidd's hidden treasure on Gardiner's Island."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Jack, in amazement.

"Fact, 'pon my word!" said Walter Jerome, in melancholy tones. "My sister and I were orphans, and poor. You can imagine our joy. We came up here to board, and to prosecute our search very quietly, to verify what we learned from the ancient paper, and had just started off, and got as far as the cave, when in an unlucky moment we saw this schooner, and came in to examine her. Set upon for robbery by some of the crew of the schooner, they captured Jenny, as you know. She had the paper in her pocket. These scoundrels must have found it and took it away from her, sent a man to investigate, and the result we will soon discover, I suppose."

"How unfortunate that they learned anything about it," said Jack regretfully. "I'm afraid you won't see the color of a cent of the treasure if it once falls into their hands."

Just then the man in the boat arrived alongside, and securing his vessel by the painter, came up on deck.

"Well, Briggs, what luck?" demanded Dick Ford gruffly.

"The paper is genuine!" exclaimed the man, triumphantly.

"What! Have you found the treasure?" incredulously asked the mate.

"Aye, sir; that is, the description of its location is true. But I fear we may not get it, unless we go at once, for there are other people, consisting of a party of treasure hunters, working dangerously near the spot where it lies. You know yourself how the fabulous wealth supposed to have been hidden by the pirate has excited people's cupidity, and that there constantly have been parties out in search of it."

"Then, as we have no time to lose, Briggs, we will get under sail, and start for Gardiner's Island at once!" said the mate.

"Aye, sir, at once."

"Have these prisoners carried down below where no one will see them, and get the anchor up. Now, boys, raise fore and mainsails, jib and forestaysails. Lively there—look alive, I say."

While the capstan was clinking as the sailors ran around in a ring with the capstan bars, the canvas fluttered up, and Jack and his friends were carried down in the dark hold in the after hatchway.

"Our doom is staved off for at least a while," thought Jack.

Soon afterwards, with her anchor afloat, and her sails raised, the *Sly Lass* glided out of the cove, and started across the sound.

Jerome was cast into a most despondent mood.

He laid beside Jack, and presently burst out with:

"I'm one of the unluckiest fellows in existence!"

"Where is the pirate's treasure located?" asked Jack.

"In a cave on the eastern side of the island," replied Jerome, gloomily.

"How did it get in there?"

"I will tell you. The pirate's wife and children joined Captain Kidd at Block Island, and were taken aboard of his ship, the pirate's ship *Antonio*. With a pale face and trembling

heart the pirate set sail for Boston. A man named Clark had accompanied the pirate's wife aboard the ship, and he wished to return to New York. Kidd turned from his course and landed Clark at Gardiner's Island. The pirate did not venture ashore. But, for some strange, unexplained reason, he deposited with Mr. Gardiner, the owner of the island, for safe keeping, a large portion of his treasure. He then sailed on to Boston."

"When Kidd was arrested there his wife had three hundred dollars and some plate. These were seized, together with all the effects aboard the *Antonio*, while some of the treasure deposited at Gardiner's Island was brought by a vessel sent for that purpose. The whole amount proved to be less than had been expected. There were 1,111 ounces of gold, 2,353 ounces of silver, 57 bags of sugar, 41 bales of goods, and 17 pieces of canvas. The small amount of property found led to the suspicion that the pirate in going slowly through Long Island Sound must have buried at Thimble Island and other places along the coast a vast amount of gold and jewels."

"But the fact of the matter?" queried Jack interestedly.

"Was that, fearing the seizure of the treasure, Mr. Gardiner concealed it in the cave, and sent word secretly to Kidd where to find it. The pirate wrote the direction on a piece of paper and left it between the leaves of the book, where I found it, and as Gardiner died without ever mentioning the matter, there the treasure has lain ever since."

"As there are no claimants to it, then, you are the owner."

"I would have shared it with you, had you aided me to get it."

"How much does the treasure amount to?"

"There are, hidden in the cavern, 80,000 ounces of gold and 25,000 ounces of silver, all in bars, molded by the pirates."

"But suppose I should get it for you?"

"My offer to share it would yet stand good."

"Then I shall do it."

"You can't, tied up."

"Oh, but I am free," said Jack, and he arose to his feet. "And now to free the rest of you, and make a break for life and liberty."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WATER CAVERN.

"How in dunder you vhas loosen got from dem ropes?" gasped Fritz.

"There is a broken bottle lying beside where I was," replied Jack in a whisper, "and by sawing my wrist fastenings upon its keen edge I cut them in two just now. Here, I will use the same implement to release the rest of you to prove what I say."

"Lord o' love!" chuckled Tim, delightedly, as he quietly rose upon his good leg, when Jack set him free, "he's told the Gospel truth."

"Und dot vhas more as you could do!" said Fritz.

"Hang yer ole skylight! If yer wuz bound I'd kick yer wi' my wooden peg!"

"Silence! No noise on your lives, boys!" remonstrated Jack. "Now, Jerome!"

"Here I am at this side," whispered the youth eagerly, as Fritz arose.

The boy set him free in a twinkling with the sharp glass, and they all stood upon their feet now, rid of their bonds.

Yet they were not out of the hold yet.

Such freedom as theirs was not of much advantage.

"Is there any way to get into the cabin?" queried Jack anxiously.

"Aye, lad, thar oughter be," said Tim. "Ginerally there are a pair o' stairs a-leadin' from ther hold up ter ther captain's cabin on freighters."

"Then let us find it. But make no noise that will betray us!"

Softly they crept forward in the gloom, and then, assured that no one but themselves were in the hold, Jack started the electric light fixed on top of the helmet he wore.

A bright shaft of light flashed forth, cutting through the gloom like a knife, and displayed their surroundings.

The hold of the schooner was filled with cases, barrels, boxes and casks filled with different things, upon which no duty had ever been paid.

These articles doubtless had been taken from various vessels, and had been carried away from the cavern at Wreckers' Crag.

The smugglers very likely intended to land them at some time or another when they got a chance to smuggle them into the city and deliver them to their consignees.

"If we could capture the schooner we could make a rich haul for the Custom House," said Jack in envious tones, as he glanced around at the dutiable packages.

"Den vhy ve shouldn't do dot?" questioned Fritz, with asperity.

"Thar's ther companionway a-leadin' up ter ther cabin now," whispered Tim.

In order not to alarm my sister," said Walter Jerome, hastily, "had I not better go ahead and speak to her?"

"Just the plan," assented the young inventor. "Go ahead."

The young man ascended the stairs, while the rest remained at the bottom, and trying the door he found it unlocked.

He pushed it open a little ways, and peeped into the cabin.

Daylight was streaming through the windows, and reclining upon a sofa he beheld his sister, bitterly weeping.

She was a very handsome blonde of about twenty, with flaxen hair, and ravishing blue eyes, a plump yet graceful figure, attired in a pretty brown cloth dress, and at her side lay a dainty straw hat.

"Jenny!" whispered the young treasure hunter.

"Oh!" she exclaimed in startled tones, springing to her feet, and gazing around with distended eyes. "Who was that?"

"Hush! Make no noise, for heaven's sake!" he implored.

"Those tones—surely it must be Walter who spoke."

"It is. Are you alone?"

"I am locked in here—a prisoner. And you?"

"Come over by this door."

She obeyed him, and he stepped into the cabin and kissed her.

In a few hurried words he explained everything, and by glancing out of one of the sternmost windows he saw that the Sly Lass had come to a pause close to some rocks on the shore of the island.

He also saw Dick Ford and a crowd of the men rowing ashore toward an opening in the rocks, evidently the mouth of a cavern that opened upon the waters of the Sound, while half a dozen of the crew remained on the schooner to guard it.

Turning to the open door he called down to Jack and his friends:

"Come up! Come up! There's a chance to escape!"

In one moment the three reached the cabin. Jack pointed to the little windows aft and said:

"What an easy matter it will be for us to go through there and drop down into the Avenger, which is yet towing astern."

"Aye, lad, but can't we git out on deck?" queried Tim, restlessly.

"The door is bolted upon the outside," answered Jenny Jerome.

"Dot saddles it, den!" exclaimed Fritz dejectedly.

"What?" questioned Jack, struck by his tones.

"I don't been able ter got oudt."

"Why not?"

"See dot vinder?"

"Yes."

"See der size of mine pelly?"

"Oh!"

"I couldn't vhas got troo dot leedle vinder alretty."

Every one had to laugh, for the Dutch boy was actually so fat he could not possibly get out the way they intended to go.

They would have to leave him in the cabin.

"Never mind," said Jack, consolingly, "we will soon let you out the door, if you can squeeze through it, for I'm going to try and gain the mastery of this schooner. Open the window, Tim, and haul in on the painter of the canoe, so we can get down on her deck."

The old salt obeyed with alacrity.

Jack passed out first, the girl followed, her brother succeeded her, and Tim came out last, leaving Fritz behind.

They got aboard of the canoe without attracting any attention, as the boatload of smugglers by this time had gone into the water cavern, and they handed Fritz a rifle.

Then they got within the cage, and arming themselves, cut the towing hawser.

Each one of them was armed with a rifle, which they protruded out through the loopholes in the cage, and starting the boat around to the side of the schooner the smugglers saw them.

Instantly they became very much alarmed.

"The prisoners have escaped!" yelled one of them frantically.

"Draw your weapons, boys!" cried the master of the watch.

"Surrender!" shouted Jack sternly.

"Never!" came the defiant reply.

"Then fire!"

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Thus burst the pellets of death fired from Jack's weapons, and with each explosion a man fell to the deck.

"Give it to them!" yelled the mate of the watch.

Bang! Bang! Bang! came a volley in return.

Jenny Jerome uttered a stifled cry and reeled back into her brother's arms.

"I am shot!" she gasped faintly.

"Oh, good heaven!" groaned Jerome in horror.

"A ball must have come in through one of the loopholes!" Jack muttered.

"This is terrible! Let me examine the wound!" gasped her brother.

He knelt down, and laying her in the bottom of the boat, saw that the ball had struck her in the neck and passed through the side.

Binding up the painful but not serious wound, he made her as comfortable as possible, and then arose in a terrible passion.

"Let me kill the man who did that!" he raved.

He took deliberate aim at the rest of the men, and fired shot after shot from his repeater into their midst, as they made a rush for the forecastle to screen themselves.

Three of the men fell.

"Board the schooner!" shouted Jerome frantically.

The Avenger had drifted alongside the Sly Lass by this time, and darting out of the cage door Jerome dashed up on the smugglers' deck, half crazed at the injury done to his sister.

Several pistol shots were fired back at the intrepid fellow by the flying outlaws, as they ran, and a ball grazing his skull stunned him, and he fell headlong.

By that time Jack and Fritz reached the schooner's deck, and, firing upon their enemies, they dropped the rest of them before they could conceal themselves in the forecastle.

"The schooner is ours!" shouted the boy.

"Aye, an' it cost 'em dear, too!" assented the old sailor.

"Led me got out of here by mineself!" yelled Fritz from the cabin.

Tim released him, and they examined the fallen men, and found that they were all wounded painfully, if not fatally.

"Bind the rascals!" ordered Jack. "We will put them in jail."

While the sailor and Dutch boy were so engaged, the boy saw Dick Ford and his boatload of friends come flying out of the water cave, alarmed by the sounds of the fray, and looking very much scared.

With one glance they saw how matters stood, knowing very well that to remain meant capture or death for one or all of them.

Jack could not have been more satisfied just then, at their escape.

"We had enough trouble to-day," he remarked dryly. "Let them go!"

By that time all the wounded men were securely bound, and brave Walter Jerome recovered his senses, and got upon his feet again.

"Let us search the cavern, Wright," he said, with feverish anxiety.

"With all my heart; the smugglers have fled," the boy replied.

They left Tim and Fritz in charge of the two boats, and entering a skiff, they rowed rapidly over to the mouth of the cavern.

The water ran into the interior, and they rowed the boat in, and found themselves within a tremendous natural cave.

The light on Jack's helmet was still blazing, and, cutting through the gloom, it gave them a good view of their surroundings.

A cry of surprise pealed from their lips at the strange scene spread before their startled view.

CHAPTER XV.

DOWN IN THE BURYING VAULT.

There was a sheet of water covering the floor of the cavern for some distance, but at the head of it spread a rocky floor.

The ceiling and walls were covered with glittering stalactites and stalagmites like great icicles, which flashed and gleamed like the finest diamonds in the electric lights.

As they stepped ashore after beaching the skiff, they beheld the skeleton of a man lying upon the ground in front of them.

"Who can it be?" asked Jack in subdued tones.

"A mystery," was Jerome's reply.

"Do you know whereabouts in this big place to find the treasure?"

"I can put my hands on it in a few minutes, the directions were so explicit," replied the youth in confident tones.

"Dick Ford and his men could scarcely have penetrated any further than where this skeleton lies before they heard our shots and came out to learn the cause of the fight."

"I am sure, then, that they did not reach the treasure. Follow me."

He led Jack along a rough, rocky passage, and they presently came into a smaller chamber, containing the decayed remains of several boxes, barrels and a table and chairs.

It had once been a habitation for somebody, to all appearance, and kneeling down in the middle of the room, Jerome began to brush the dirt away, and closely examine the floor.

"Ah! Here it is!" he exclaimed.

Jack saw him grasp a rusty iron ring, and give it a pull.

There was no result, and he pulled again.

All his strength was used in the effort, yet he could do nothing.

"You'll have to help me, Wright!" he grunted.

Jack took hold with him, and by their combined efforts they pulled up a thick trap door of solid oak planks.

It had been wedged so tightly from long disuse that there could be no doubt that it had not been opened by the smugglers.

A dark aperture in the floor was revealed.

"There's where the treasure lies!" said Jerome, pointing down the hole.

"I don't believe that the messenger sent by Dick Ford penetrated this place," said Jack skeptically, "for, as you are aware, it took our united strength to lift that trap, and he alone and unaided could not have done it. You can therefore imagine he wasn't down in that vault."

"He discovered its location, though."

"How do you know he did?"

"By the looks of the dirt covering the trap."

"Had it been tampered with?"

"Yes—recently, too; it was very evident."

Jack flashed his electric light down in the opening, and revealed a flight of stone steps, covered with dust an inch thick.

Not a mark was upon the surface of it.

Here was further proof of no one having been down in the pit.

Had anybody descended those stairs they would have left the imprint of their shoes upon the dust, thus betraying themselves.

"If the treasure was put down there," said the young inventor, "it must yet be intact. Come—let us descend and find out."

He led the way down as he spoke, and descended ten feet.

There was a strange odor permeating the vault—a putrid, nauseating smell, sickening to their nostrils, that made them shiver.

Hardly had they both reached the foot of the stairs than they were startled to observe that the vault was a burying place for the dead.

Upon several stands ranged around the brick walls stood a number of leaden caskets.

This discovery had hardly been made when there sounded a most terrific explosion that half deafened them.

One of the metal caskets had burst by the confined gas of the body which was confined in it.

Particles of the leaden coffin flew in all directions, and all that remained of the corpse was blown to pieces, and sent flying.

A shriek of intense horror burst from Walter Jerome's lips, and he was knocked down by the fearful shock.

Even Jack was very much startled by the unexpected occurrence.

"Let me get out of here!" groaned Jerome, in stifled tones.

"Hush! It is only one of the coffins that burst!" said Jack.

"Yes, I know," gasped the young man; "but I'm choking—I can't breathe."

"This is awful!" muttered Jack.

They beat a precipitous retreat up into the cavern, for the explosion had blown up all the dust in a strangling cloud.

In the cave they breathed again in comparative comfort, and soon recovered themselves once more.

"You had better remain up here," said Jack. "I'll close the visor of my helmet, and go down alone, where I'll be protected from the appalling odor and the choking dust."

"By all means," assented the other, relieved at the proposition.

Jack closed his helmet, started the air in his knapsack, and went down.

By the time he reached the bottom the dust had settled, and he was able to plainly distinguish objects lying around.

Only the shattered particles of the exploded casket remained, and he saw that there was nothing in the vault but the other caskets.

He was disappointed, for he expected to find several treasure boxes.

Approaching one of the coffins, he peered in through the plate glass at the head of it, and saw the bloated face of a dead woman.

With a shudder he recoiled, and passed on to the next one.

The engraved plate arrested his attention, and reading the inscription upon it, he saw that the remains was a relative of the former owner of the island.

It was, therefore, evident that the vault had been built expressly for the purpose of a tomb.

But two more caskets remained, and they were very large.

They were not opened at the end, but the lids were fastened down by thumbscrews.

Jack paused hesitatingly, for he did not fancy meddling with them, in fear of another explosion injuring him.

Besides, the sight was exceedingly revolting to him.

Still, he had an idea that there might be treasure concealed in the leaden boxes, and knew that there was no way of discovering unless he opened them and looked in.

He soon made up his mind, however, and muttered:

"I'll do it."

The thumbscrews were fastened tight, but he managed to unfasten them, and drew the lid aside.

The box contained the treasure.

It was a cunning device to conceal it.

Any one might have expected to find a repulsive corpse in the casket, and would scarcely have ventured to open it, searching for the pirate's valuable treasure.

The casket was filled with rotten canvas bags, which, breaking, had run their contents together.

They had been filled with bars of pure gold.

Jack attempted to lift the casket.

But it was too heavy.

He desisted, and turned his attention to the other casket, and soon found that it was filled with pigs of silver.

"The canoe wouldn't hold it," he muttered. "We will have to load it upon the smugglers' schooner to carry it away."

He then left the vault.

"Well?" eagerly asked Walter Jerome.

"It is all right—the treasure is there."

"And we can get it?"

"Easily."

"What is it worth?"

"How much did you say there was?"

"Gold? 30,000 ounces."

"At \$25 an ounce, \$2,000,000."

"Not counting the silver?"

"No. How much is there of that?"

"25,000 ounces."

"Walter Jerome, we will each realize over a million."

"For heaven's sake, let us get it out of here at once."

"You are right. Dick Ford knows how valuable it is, and may return."

"If he does, he will be sure to make a desperate fight for it."

They hastened back to the skiff, got aboard, and rowed out to the schooner, which they found in the same position.

Tim and Fritz were apprised of their discovery.

Walter Jerome then put on Tim's diving suit, and leaving the old sailor on board of the sloop, they sent the canoe into

the cavern, fastened her to the shore, and returned to the vault.

There they set to work transferring the treasure to the canoe.

As soon as they had a load, they carried it out to the schooner, and leaving it aboard of her returned for more.

Several hours thus passed by.

It was mid-day before they had the gold and silver out of the vault on board of the Sly Lass, and Jack entered the canoe and started her back for the cavern, to get Jerome's rowboat.

As the boy passed into the cavern, he saw a bright spark flying along the ground in the distance, on shore, and with his curiosity aroused, turned the searchlight upon it.

A cry of alarm pealed from his lips.

It was a fuse running toward a keg, half buried in a mass of rocks, and he saw a sailor rushing away in the gloom.

The man was, he observed, one of the smugglers, who must have entered the cavern by the shore entrance, and it flashed across the boy's mind that the keg was filled with powder.

Dick Ford had probably seen them removing the treasure, and to avenge his loss designed to blow up the cavern, and thus sacrifice our friends' lives.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STRUGGLE ON A PIER.

If Jack's version of the matter was correct, his life was in great peril, and he at once turned the Avenger around and started her for the cave entrance at full speed.

Away dashed the canoe, and the fiery spark skipped along the ground rapidly, threatening to travel faster than the boat.

Out upon the Sound shot the Avenger.

She had scarcely cleared the passage, when there sounded an awful roar within the cave, and a blinding flash.

Out through the entrance puffed a volume of smoke and dust, and up on the land there came a vast upheaval.

The keg must have been filled with powder, for the entire roof was shattered, and coming down, sunk in.

The cave was no more.

Flying particles rained down around the boat, but the strong cage amply protected Jack, and he received no injury.

Upon a distant eminence stood Dick Ford and his gang, watching the escaping boat with feelings of the most intense chagrin and rage, while upon the schooner stood his friends around the recumbent figure of Jenny Jerome, who had been transferred to the Sly Lass.

They were all very much startled by the explosion, and feared that Jack's life might pay the forfeit.

Soon undeceived by seeing the Avenger go speeding towards them, they set up a wild shout of exultation.

Within a few moments Jack was close beside them.

"What was the matter?" shouted Jerome anxiously.

"The smugglers blew up the cave, thinking I was in it."

"Baffled them again, eh?"

"Your boat was lost."

"No matter. I can stand it."

Jack boarded the schooner, after tying the canoe astern.

"Let us get up sail and leave here," said he.

The anchor had been dropped, but they raised it, and then the sails were unfurled to the breeze.

Jack grasped the tiller, and as the schooner tacked away from Gardiner's Island, a yell pealed from the smugglers.

"We shall meet again!" he heard Dick Ford shout furiously.

"I hope so," demurely replied the boy. "Nothing would

give me greater pleasure than to meet you again. I then could put you under arrest."

"They feel vindictive at losing the treasure," laughed Walter Jerome.

"Shiminey Christmas, vot a sell for dem!" chuckled Fritz. "I hope dot you may die if dey vhasn't near grazy! Shust listen to 'em schvear!"

"Aye, now," added Tim, giving a hitch to his pants, "but yer ain't a-going ter leave wi'out a-sayin' good-by wi' yer gun, be ye, lad?"

"There's no use tackling them now," responded Jack, "for they could easily escape us inland. Besides, it would be a useless risk of losing our prisoners, the schooner, the treasure, and every other advantage we have thus far gained by down-right hard struggling."

The rest could not fail to coincide with this view, for it was sensible, and much as they wished to capture the outlaws, they had to forego the attempt and leave them behind unmolested.

With a long tack the schooner left the island far astern, and reaching down the Sound, she headed for New York.

Tim was in his element when he took charge of the boat a few minutes afterwards, issued order after order in rapid succession, and steered the boat so skillfully that she made fourteen knots.

"Gol durn my keel," he remarked, with a broad grin, to Jenny Jerome, who reclined in a chair beside him, "I feel's if I wuz young agin."

"You must have been a great sailor then," said the young lady smilingly.

"Sailor! Why, bless yer sweet buttons, I wuz the all-fired-est young swab wot ever trod ther deck o' ther man-o'-war Wabash. Didn't ye ever hear tell o' how I navigated her during ther late war, an' busted ther b'iler o' ther commodore o' ther rebel fleet wot wuz a-surroundin' us?"

"As I have known you only a little while, sir, I did not hear the story."

"Lor' save yer, lass, I thought as everybody heered o'——"

"Rats by der garret!" interposed Fritz, as he rushed away in disgust.

"Shut up, gosh durn ye!" roared Tim, shaking a fist at him; then he turned to Jack suddenly and said: "Now, thar's Mr. Wright. I'm dead sure as he'll b'ar out my statement, when I ses——"

"I really haven't time," grinned Jack, hurrying away with a pitying glance at the ancient mariner's guileless victim, and muttering: "Lord help her!"

Tim was in nowise abashed, however, but fixing the stony glare of his glass eye upon the girl, he said, impressively:

"Yer see, lass, it happened this way; we laid hauled to atween four o' ther enemy, when a forty-pounder carried away our bowsprit, an' as we wuz crippled, we might a-fell into ther rebels' hands. But I wuz at ther wheel, an' I hard up ther helm, shivered ther aftersails, an' ther topmen took in ther aftersails, when I brung her up afore the wind. 'Take ther foretopmast breastback stays forrard ower ther tops'l yard,' I yells. 'Hook ther pendant tackles an' set springstays an' set 'em up ter ther catheads. Unreeve the main topmast and springstays an' set 'em up ter ther foretops'l sheet bits. Hitch a hawser ter ther foretopmast head, take it through one o' ther hawse-holes, an' set it up on ther gun deck. Send down ther topgallant yards an' masts an' clear ther wreck. Rig a jury bowsprit of a spare jib-boom,' sez I, 'an'——'"

"But what does this all mean?" helplessly interrupted the befogged girl.

"Lor' don't yer know?" asked Tim in surprise.

"No, sir," said the girl.

"Then thar ain't no use in me tellin' yer ther story."

The girl looked relieved to hear that there wasn't, and

Tim spent the rest of the afternoon pitying the girl's ignorance of seafaring terms.

By nightfall the boat reached New York, and hauling into the Battery, Walter Jerome went ashore and secured several trucks, when the treasure was carted away to a safe deposit vault.

The young man and his charming sister then bade our friends good-by, and, entering a carriage, were driven away.

"He said he would sell the treasure and mail me a check for a half of what he may realize," said Jack, when they were gone. "He is not obliged to do so, and may change his mind before he does so. But if he proves to be as honest as he seems, I'll share the money up with you, boys."

The authorities were at once apprised of the rich capture they made, and while the prisoners were taken away the contraband goods were carted to the seizure rooms of the Custom House, and two officers were put in charge of the captive vessel.

It was late that night before our friends turned in aboard of the Avenger, and had a good night's rest.

On the following day Jack went ashore to make his formal report, and give evidence to the authorities in regard to the capture that was bound to convict the culprits.

"I have got more than half of the rascals under arrest so far," said the boy; "but I shall not stop until I have arrested this entire gang."

"Before you began," replied the Collector of the Port, to whom he was speaking in the latter individual's private office, "we were greatly harassed by these men, and I find that the gang is composed of the most reckless and daring smugglers in America. With the breaking up of this well-organized gang we shall have no more to contend against than the ordinary transgressors."

"They seem to be a very reckless, desperate and bold gang," commented the boy, "and I shouldn't wonder if some of them are captured dead before I give up the chase."

"You have full authority to use firearms in any manner consistent with your work," was the significant reply, "and this Government shall be put under a lasting obligation to you, for the men you are fighting are too smart for the officers who are regularly employed to hunt them down. It is phenomenal what success you are meeting with, and I trust that you will have equally as good fortune up to the end."

"Should I fail," replied the boy, "it won't be on account of not trying to capture the beggars," and so saying he took his leave.

The boy returned to his boat by nightfall.

He had entirely disposed of the work he had accomplished, and strove to find out in which direction he might now turn to look for Dick Ford and the remainder of his gang.

The boy had to his amazement been met with a pretty cool reception at the hands of the regular service hands, and gained no information from any of them.

It was very clear to him that they were insanely jealous of him, and, like the police treat private detectives, was looked upon as an interloper, who had no business interfering with their work.

Even among the men whom he should have found firm allies he discovered instead the bitterest foes.

The boy was chagrined over it, but resolved to have nothing to do with any of them, and ask no favors, as he had pluck and self-confidence enough to consider himself capable of coping with his enemies single handed.

When he reached the Avenger and told Tim and Fritz all that had passed they were very angry, and spent a long time in passing very forcible opinions of the revenue officers at large.

Toward midnight Jack started the canoe up the East River.

"We had better patrol these waters," he assured his friends,

"for here we are more likely to fall in with Ford than anywhere else."

It was so dark gliding along the wharves that they had trouble to see ten yards ahead; but as they wished to mask their movements they kept there, and drew near the bridge.

Just as the boat arrived at a long pier south of the bridge dock, they heard the sounds of a struggle upon it, and glancing up beheld a man striking another man upon the head with a club, causing his victim to fall prostrate.

Jack brought the boat to a sudden pause.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN IMPORTANT CAPTURE.

"Help! Help!" shrieked the stricken man, as he fell.

"Silence!" hissed his persecutor.

"Police! Murder!" continued the victim in faint tones.

"Curse ye, die, then!" yelled the other furiously.

And seizing his victim he flung the man into the river.

He could not swim, and was dazed from the blow, gave a gurgling cry, and sank beneath the waves.

With one bound Fritz went into the river after him, and the man who committed the murderous deed turned, and was just about to run away, when he was startled by hearing Jack cry:

"Halt!"

He paused and glanced around.

There was a startled look in his eyes, and his face was pale.

But when he saw Jack standing up in the strange boat, attired in his singular-looking suit of mail, aiming a rifle at him, while the blazing glare of the electric light shot from the lamp on his polished helmet, he nearly fainted.

The wild look in his eyes and the pallor of his cheeks intensified.

"An infernal spirit!" he groaned, rooted to the spot with terror.

The boat glided up to the dock, and as the tide was light, it brought Jack almost upon a level with the top of the wharf.

With one leap he landed upon it.

"Hands up!" he exclaimed sternly.

And click! click! went the rifle.

His voice broke the spell enchanting the frightened criminal, and he wheeled around and dashed away.

Jack ran after him.

He had not gone far, however, when he tripped and fell, the rifle dropped from his hand, and the man gained a better lead.

Like a flash the young inventor was upon his feet again, however, and he sped after the stranger, who then glanced back over his shoulder to see what occasioned the noise Jack made in falling.

"Stand!" exclaimed the boy.

At the same moment he extended his hand, and having put the current of the electric battery on top of his knapsack into communication with his armor, he caused a streak of sparks to flash from his finger ends.

The fugitive gave a stifled yell, and dropped upon his knees.

"Mercy!" he groaned, clasping his trembling hands. "Spare me!"

Jack pounced upon him the next moment, but the moment he touched the man with his hand a complete circuit was formed from the electric fluid his suit was charged with, and the man received such a shock it knocked him over.

"Oh, God!" he shrieked. "It is the devil."

"Keep quiet," hissed Jack, shaking him.

"Stop it! Oh, I'm burning—I'm full of pins and needles!"

"His infernal row will bring a crowd around!" thought Jack.

He thereupon let go of the man with one hand, and saw that he was a rough, seafaring man in citizen's clothes.

Retaining a clutch upon him, he jerked the rascal to his feet.

"Come with me," said the boy gruffly.

"Yes, yes, I'll do anything, only don't hurt me!" whined the man.

"Hurry up—people are coming out on the dock."

Dragging the fellow back to the end of the pier, he saw that Fritz had rescued the rascal's victim from the river.

They were both aboard of the canoe.

Jack saw that the noise they had made had attracted the attention of some people who had been passing, and they now came swarming out on the pier.

Recovering his fallen rifle, the boy said to his captive:

"Get down on that boat!"

"Why—it's Jack Wright's electric canoe!" gasped the man, hesitating.

"By Jove, and now I recognize you as one of Dick Ford's men!" cried the boy in surprised tones. "That's why you know me, eh?"

"Then you are Jack Wright?"

"Aye—get down in the canoe, I tell you!"

"Great Lord! That settles my case, then."

The man obeyed Jack's order, and Tim snapped a pair of handcuffs upon his wrists the moment he reached the deck.

"Rattle my lower riggin'!" chuckled the old sailor, "but here's a decent haul! By gum, it's one more o' them 'ere harbor pirates!"

"Is his victim dead?"

"Nein," said Fritz. "I vhas bulled him outer der vater alretty."

"Good for you! Ah, there he is, recovering, eh?"

"I tink so, neider!"

Jack extinguished the lights, grasped the wheel, and started the boat slowly away from the dock up the river, for there were now a lot of people on the dock he just left.

In the gloom no one could see the boat gliding softly away.

"What did you tackle that man for?" demanded Jack of the prisoner.

"He was three sheets in the wind, and I was hard up."

"Ah, you was robbing him?"

"Rather. He had a fine ticker and sparkler, and I wanted them."

"You didn't gain much by your rascality."

"Say, if you'll let me go I'll give 'em back!"

"Not much. I want some information from you."

"What about?"

"Your messmates. Where are they?"

"I dunno."

"Here, I'll take hold of you again if you don't confess, and——"

"Oh, heavens! Don't! I'll own up. I wouldn't suffer such torture again for a million. Let up on me, will you?"

"Then admit where they are."

"Robbing a ship up the river."

"From smugglers they have turned river thieves, eh?"

"Had to—we all are dead broke."

"How many men are there in the gang?"

"Seven, besides me."

"What dock are they at?"

"Just this side of the foot of Grand Street."

"There's a fearful current sweeps around there. What boat is it?"

"The Mandarin, from Shanghai, China, with a cargo of opium."

"I know where she lies. Another question—didn't Dick Ford cause the cavern at Gardiner's Island to be blown up?"

"Aye, an' I was the one who did it."

"You!" exclaimed Jack in surprise.

"Now, don't blame me. I did it because I had to. He'd have shot me if I disobeyed. I wasn't in love with such a dangerous job. He saw you getting the treasure out, and felt spiteful towards you. His object was to blow you to pieces."

"I thought so. I suppose you did not remain there long?"

"No. After you sailed away we paid a tugboat for a hitch down here, and arrived to-day," replied the captive.

Jack now steered the boat under the bridge, and in passing the ferry on the other side of it, was nearly run down by one of the boats shooting out into the stream unexpectedly.

The canoe was turned just in time to avoid getting hit by one of the pounding paddle-wheels, and then ran astern of the ferryboat, crept in along the docks again, and continued up the river close to the green, slimy spiles.

By this time the man they rescued had fully regained his senses, and began to question Tim, who told him what happened.

He complained of a headache from the blow the prisoner had given him, and when the old sailor took his gold watch and diamond stud away from the smuggler, and restored them to him he swore he would never again touch a drop of liquor.

It had led him into a scrape that had nearly cost him his life, and he meant never to run chances of getting into any more trouble of the same kind again, he averred in solemn tones.

"Can't you set me ashore?" he asked plaintively. "I want to go home. I've got all I want of this accursed adventure."

"Not now," said Jack quietly. "We want your evidence to convict this man."

"Oh, let the beggar go. I am satisfied to escape as well as I did."

"That may suit you, but it don't suit us," said Jack. "We are in the Government's employ, and must do our duty to the letter."

"All right."

Just then a long, dark figure glided athwart the Avenger's bows and there came a collision, which brought forth a volley of expletives.

It was another boat, a long, black-painted skiff, and it was nearly capsized by the shock, but its occupants saved it from going over, and one of them flashed the light of a bull's-eye upon the electric canoe, and growled:

"Haul to, there!"

"Was you hurt any?" asked Jack, complying.

He flashed a light from his helmet lantern upon the speaker, and to their surprise they saw that it was a river police boat.

"What sort of a craft is that, anyway?" grumbled the officer astern.

"A revenue boat," promptly replied the boy.

"Oh, but you haven't got your port lights lit."

"And for the very good reason that we don't want to be seen."

"Why, have you got any work on hand?"

"Some that belongs to your department—river thieves."

"You don't say! Where are they?"

"Hitch on astern, and we will take you to the place."

"Then catch this tow line."

A rope was flung, which Fritz caught, and making it fast astern the Avenger was started again, towing the police boat after her.

She worked very badly, however, there seeming to be but little energy in the batteries.

In quarter of an hour she arrived at the dock indicated by their prisoner, and came to a pause to reconnoiter the

ground, while the police boat rowed away into the slip where the ship was moored.



CHAPTER XVIII.

A BRUSH WITH RIVER THIEVES.

Nothing but the splashing of the waves and the creaking of the ship, as it heaved on the water, broke the stillness for a few moments.

The darkness was so intense that they could not see anything, but just then the prisoner in the bottom of the canoe uttered a long, shrill whistle in a peculiar manner.

"Confound him!" hissed Jack, springing upon the man, and clapping a hand over his mouth. "He has given them a warning signal!"

The boy's action came too late.

They heard the rush of flying footsteps on the deck of the Mandarin, and Jack left the man, turned on the searchlight, and flashed its rays upon the big ship, flooding it with a mellow glow.

They now saw a rowboat towing astern of the ship with two men in it who were unfastening the painter.

On the deck of the craft stood several more men at the taffrail in the act of sliding down a rope into the boat.

The police patrol boat lay alongside of the ship.

"Here they come!" shouted Jack.

His words electrified every one.

The police boat shot toward the stern, the thieves began to spring overboard, several of them ran to the dock upon which they landed, and Tim and Fritz, armed with rifles, began to blaze away at the frightened rascals.

Jack saw that the thieves had already laden their boat with a lot of tin cans, in which they knew the opium they were after was packed, and he paddled his boat toward them.

Some of the men on the ship's deck seeing them, they began to discharge their revolvers, and the river police returned their fire.

In a moment four of the men were in the thieves' boat, and began to row away with might and main.

Upon seeing that the rest of the rascals were going for the dock to escape into the city, the police boat was headed for the dock, and two of the officers, landing, gave chase to them.

That left the thieves in the boat for Jack to cope with, and the boy turned the lever to put the machinery in motion so that they could run the rascals down.

The screw failed to revolve just at this critical moment, and then like a flash it dawned upon Jack's mind that he had failed to purchase chemicals to store the batteries.

They were nearly exhausted that day when they started, and his forgetfulness now left them at a great disadvantage, for it was impossible to make the screw revolve without power.

"Vhy yer don'd go after dem?" asked Fritz, in surprise, as the searchlight suddenly went out, leaving them in darkness.

"The batteries are played out," said Jack, despairingly. "Get the paddles."

"Oh, Lor'!" groaned Tim, "an' jest when we needed it most!"

"Hurry up, boys! I'll have some light in a moment."

The thieves were fast escaping, their boat having disappeared in the gloom, and they could just faintly hear the sound of their oars in the distance as they went around the bend, up the river with the flowing tide.

Out came their paddles, just as a volley of shots were exchanged between the policemen and the thieves upon the dock, and while they were paddling the canoe, the man whom they rescued steered her.

Jack hastily raised the sails, fastened the sheet lines, and when they began to draw the canoe sped along more rapidly than their enemies were rowing.

She now bade fair to soon overtake the fugitives.

Light was imperative now, to see where they were going, and Jack hastily gathered the three knapsacks in the bow, and joined the batteries on them in series by wires.

He then attached them to the searchlight, and a brilliant glow shot out of it again two hundred feet ahead.

True, it was not a quarter as strong as the light was when worked by the boat's batteries, but it answered all requirements now.

Jack bitterly reproached himself for his forgetfulness in not getting his battery charged before they set out, and recalling to mind how badly the boat worked when they took the river police in tow, he wondered why he did not think more about it then.

Regrets were useless now, however.

Impelled by paddles and sails, the boat forged ahead rapidly, and overhauled the river thieves' skiff so fast that they soon had them plainly outlined in the glaring sheen of light.

The boy had relieved the stranger at the wheel.

Tim stood beside the prostrate prisoner, and shaking his wooden leg in the rascal's face, he growled:

"Blast yer ugly mug! Why don't yer tell 'em as we're a-bearin' down on 'em so fast now as we'll soon collide, hey? Yer spiled our fun nice, you did, an', gosh blame yer, the minute as yer opens yer jawin' hatches agin I'll stow this 'ere timber leg down in yer hold."

As the prisoner had no ambition to have Tim's leg rammed down his throat, he very discreetly kept still.

Nearer and nearer drew the canoe to the skiff, and Jack now saw that the inmates of the boat were straining every effort to reach the bulkhead of the shore.

Their objective point soon became apparent.

They were heading for the East Houston Street sewer.

This sewer once terminated at the bulkhead, but now, through a long wooden cylinder, it runs out through a pier of a Williamsburg ferry, and discharges at the pier line directly into the current.

The cylinder was above the water line, so there was no possibility of the thieves running their boat into the dirty opening.

"Look out, boys!" exclaimed Jack. "I'm going to run them down!"

In came Tim and Fritz's paddles, and the boy spun the wheel around, and like a flash the canoe bore down upon the skiff.

Crash! came the boats together.

A roar went up from the four thieves as their boat was violently rocked by the shock, and the gunwale was crushed like an eggshell.

Then over they went into the water.

It was a miracle that the skiff was not capsized when the men were spilled out, but, strangely enough, it righted itself buoyantly.

The four men who were knocked from the boat were all good swimmers, and, led by Dick Ford, whom Jack now recognized as the foremost man of the lot, they struck out for the sewer.

"Hold up, there!" shouted Jack at them.

They paid no heed to his warning.

"Wing them, boys!" exclaimed Jack.

Three shots were fired at the swimmers, and they were struck, as their cries of pain very plainly expressed.

"Hold up, I tell you!" reiterated Jack. "We will fire to kill!"

"Stop!" yelled one of the men. "I cave!"

The boat went dashing among them, and Jack brought her up in the wind with fluttering sails.

Dick Ford doggedly kept on.

He did not intend to surrender.

Upon reaching the sewer vent, he climbed up into it and disappeared while Jack and his friends were hauling the three disabled thieves into the canoe from the water.

In a few moments they had them all aboard.

"Where is Ford?" questioned Jack, looking around.

"He vasn'd hurd," said Fritz.

"What! Has he escaped?"

"Sure. Didn't yer seened him got in by der sewer?"

"No—I was too busy with these fellows to notice him."

"Vell, he vhas gotten away vonct."

"And we can't follow him there."

"I tink so, neider."

They bound their wounded prisoners securely.

Jack then went ashore, and purchasing the chemicals he needed at a drug store he returned to the canoe, and re-charging the battery jars, he hauled down the sails, and took the thieves' boat in tow.

The screw was then started, and the boat sent down the river.

"We will see what the river police have done," said the boy.

"They wuz a-fightin' hard when we left," said Tim.

"I hope they captured all the gang," said Jack wistfully, "for none will then remain but Dick Ford."

"It looked ter me as if they might a-had 'em all safe."

The canoe's searchlight was adjusted to the proper battery on the way down to where they had left the river police fighting, and with everything working properly they arrived at the pier where the fight had been going on.

The police were there yet, having two of the rascals prisoners, the other one having made his escape ashore, and the crew of the ship, aroused by the shots, had come up on deck.

There they found that two officers who had been on watch were stupefied by chloroform, administered by the thieves.

They could not be aroused.

Then Jack gave them back the cans of opium stored in the boat, and the captain warmly expressed his thanks to the boy.

The six prisoners were then all huddled on board of the canoe, as Jack had a prior charge of smuggling against them, and wishing the river police good-night, the boy sent his boat flying down to the Battery.

There the prisoners were taken ashore and put in jail, word of the event was sent to the Custom House, and Jack let the man he rescued give his evidence and go.

The boy then returned to the Avenger.

They were all very tired from their exertions, and glad to turn in to seek the repose they needed so much, just as the clock struck twelve.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN SEARCH OF A WRECK.

On the following morning a tugboat came steaming up the bay with a bark in tow, the bowsprit of which had evidently been torn away from the force of a collision.

She was hauled in at a dock near by, and soon afterwards Jack met her captain, whom he questioned about the matter.

"It happened last night durin' the darkness," said the old sea dog. "We was beating along on the coast from Charleston, an' had got somewhere this side o' Cape Hatteras, when we fouled a derelict. It carried away our bowsprit, and we wouldn't a-got in by this time if that 'ere tug hadn't been passin' an' picked us up."

"What sort of a vessel was the wreck?"

"The dismantled hulk of a big ship. I made out the name on her stern to be the Hattie Hope."

"Why," said Jack in surprise, as he pulled the morning paper out of his pocket, and pointed out a paragraph, "she was dismantled in the gale the day before yesterday, and imagining that she was about to founder, her crew took to the boats, abandoned her, and was picked up by an incoming German steamer."

"You don't tell me?"

"She had a very valuable cargo of carpets, gloves, knit goods and seal skins, upon which there must have been a very heavy insurance. If the wreck is afloat yet, so near, and can be saved, I am going to get her. Besides, she is a menace to every ship coming and going in and out of the port of New York."

"You couldn't do an act of more generosity than to pick her up," said the captain. "See how she has injured my craft."

Jack went aboard of the Avenger, and apprised his friends of what he had learned, and what he intended to do.

"It comes in the line of the revenue service duty," said he, in ending his story, "and the salvage upon her will figure up high."

"Let us got oudt to vonct, den," assented Fritz.

"Hold hard, thar, messmates," interposed Tim, holding up his hand.

"What now?" queried Jack in surprise.

"Don't yer hev nothin' ter do wi' derelicts—it's bad luck."

"Bosh!" said Jack skeptically.

"I'll prove it!" retorted Tim solemnly.

"Do so."

"Waal, yer see, it happened this way."

"Vot iss dis—vun of your shaw breakers?" demanded Fritz.

"It's ther solemn truth!" said Tim angrily.

"When I wuz aboard o' ther ole Wabash, we run afoul o' a derelict one night," said Tim impressively, "an' strikin' her amidships down she sunk——"

"Und dot vhas der end of id alretty?"

"No. She arose again, an', as ther sunlight streamed down on her——"

"You just said it happened at night," expostulated Jack.

"Waal," said Tim, unmoved, "s'posen I did? We wuz near ther land o' ther midnight sun, up in the Arctic regions. As I wuz a-sayin', thar she arose with a big hole stove in her bows whar we hit her, an'——"

"Didn't yer vhas hit her amidships alretty?" blandly asked Fritz.

"Aye, but our stem slided along till it was stopped by her catheads afore it runned inter her hull," explained Tim.

"I think you had better tell us the rest of that story when we return, Tim," said Jack, winking at Fritz. "In the meantime, we will run chances of disaster by going out and picking up the wreck."

"Oh, it's jest ther same ter me," growled Tim. "But remember, if anything happens, an' we gits killed, don't blame it on me. Besides, this is Friday, an' it's awful bad luck to let sail that day."

Jack was not superstitious, however, and started the boat, while Fritz plagued Tim until he nearly had a fit.

The sky was gray, and rain was falling.

But the canoe dashed away down the bay, passed out of the Narrows, and soon left Sandy Hook astern.

Jack enjoined his two friends to keep a sharp lookout.

If the abandoned ship was anywhere in sight they could not miss it armed as they were with powerful glasses.

But they cruised around all day in the rain without finding any trace of the wreck, and questioned the people about her on every vessel that passed anywhere near them.

Night fell upon the sea, and the Avenger by that time had glided over to the Highlands, off Barnegat.

There was a projecting strip of lofty cliffs ahead of them, and Jack turned the canoe to the northeast to get around them, when they brought the other side into view.

This had no sooner been done when an exclamation burst from the boy's lips, and pointing ahead he exclaimed:

"By Jove! There she is now!"

Tim and Fritz sprang to their feet, and peered ahead.

Within a curve of the shore line crossed a long, narrow sand-bar, and upon it they saw the wreck of a white ship.

There she lay, heeled over, the keel of the stern firmly lodged in the sand, waves beating against her, and her battered hulk swaying to and fro at the bow, which was afloat.

The boy had scarcely seen her when he became cognizant of another very disagreeable fact—there were six fishing smacks lying at anchor a short distance away from her, and some of the crews had boarded the wreck, and were then in the act of stealing the cargo.

"We won't get her away from those fellows without a struggle," said Jack, as soon as this fact became manifest to all hands, "but we have got to drive them away, boys, for the work they are engaged in is as bad as highway robbery."

"Drive ther canoe over now," said Tim, energetically, as he laid his hand upon a rifle, "an' dash me if we don't stop 'em afore they can git away wi' ther fust boatload o' spoils!"

"Donner vetter!" muttered Fritz excitedly. "Dere vhas near as a hundred of dem alretty, but I don'd been a-scared if dere vhas only fifty."

Jack managed the boat carefully, as he was afraid of running her aground, and brought her around to the drifting bow of the wreck.

The men upon her deck were roughly-clad oystermen.

Upon seeing the canoe approaching, one of them yelled at Jack:

"Come, now, you clear out of this, stranger—you ain't wanted here!"

"Ah!" replied the boy. "But I have come to bring this vessel back to port."

The effect of his words upon the men had a magical effect.

They drew together in a group, and began to talk excitedly, the result of their debate being to repulse the boy's efforts.

All their avarice had been aroused by the sight of the rich cargo, which they intended to sell when they landed it, and as there was every prospect of a large amount of money coming from the transaction, they resolved to hold on to the ship.

Moreover, they saw that they were opposed by only three in a rather frail-looking canoe, and calculated that it would be a very easy matter for them to overcome them.

Accordingly, the first spokesman now addressed Jack with:

"As we picked the wreck up at sea, and towed her in here, we don't intend to give her up to you, stranger, so you can get the salvage money that is due us for finding her."

"You shall have to," Jack calmly replied, as he placed the flag-pole and ran up the custom house flag, "and here is the emblem that authorizes me to take her in tow."

"A revenue boat!" exclaimed the oystermen.

"Exactly so," replied Jack, "and it is my duty to protect wrecked property from the ravages of thieves, such as you evidently are, for I see you are in the act of stripping her of her cargo now."

A silence followed this accusation.

The guilty men realized that they were caught in the act of a most unlawful piece of work, and it made them desperate.

They held another consultation, and then their leader said, in sullen tones of defiance:

"Since you've caught us in the act, and there ain't no use of

us trying to hide our intentions from you any longer, why we will just up and confess to doing it. But that don't say as we will give up the wreck, not by a long shot. We've got her, and we are going to keep her till we get all the cargo. Ain't we, boys?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Aye, aye!" chorused the rest defiantly.

"Then you mean to fight for her, do you?" asked Jack.

"Oh, we're armed with weapons we use to protect oyster beds," replied the man, "and if you attempt to board us, we won't stop at shooting you down nohow. Will we, boys?"

"No, no, no!" cried his followers, vehemently.

"Recollect, you are resisting the law!" said Jack, persuasively.

"Oh, we don't care. There ain't nobody around this lonely place who could interfere with us by helping you, or reporting what we are doing, and if it comes to a fight, and you fellows get killed, no one will be the wiser of it. Will they, boys?"

"Fool!" muttered Jack contemptuously. "He little knows our strength."

Tim raised the cage, and Fritz, at Jack's order, got out the cup-suckers, fastened one end of them astern, and the boy then ran his canoe up to the hull of the stranded boat.

"Fix the suckers on her bow, Fritz," he ordered, just as the canoe ran up to the wreck, and the oystermen upon the deck peered down over the bulwarks at them curiously. "The tide is rising fast, and in a short time we can pull the wreck off the bar, and drag her away."

"Come, now," shouted the oysterman up on the deck. "I want you to get away from there right away—do you hear?"

Fritz attached the suckers to the planks of the wreck, and, as everything was all right, Jack steered his boat away and ran her out until the hawsers became as taut as a fiddle string.

CHAPTER XX.

THE OYSTERMEN BEATEN.

"Shack! Shack! Dey vhas tooken de freight inter deir poats by der stern of der wreck, und vhas goin' ter carry id away to deir smacks ower our noses!" exclaimed Fritz.

It was a fact, and it startled Jack.

"Arm yourselves!" he exclaimed imperatively.

Tim and Fritz hastily obeyed, and the boy shouted to the oystermen:

"If you persist in robbing this ship, we shall fire upon you."

"Ah, you go to blazes!" retorted one of the men.

"Give them a double volley, boys," said Jack.

They each fired two shots, and when the explosive shots burst in their midst the oystermen paused, flung down the packages they were carrying, and hid behind the bulwarks.

From there they began to shoot back at the canoe, thus showing that they were not falsely boasting when they said that they were armed, and would resist interference.

Not a shot could penetrate the cage, however, and our friends gave them another fusillade.

The men upon the deck of the wreck were only a portion of the crews from the smacks, and as soon as the firing begun the rest of them began to sail their boats over toward the wreck in order to lend their companions assistance.

As soon as Jack saw this, a serious look swept over his face, and turning to his friends, he said:

"If the rest join the ones on the wreck, we will have a hot time of it, for there must be over a hundred of them."

"Won't ther Avenger pull ther wreck offer ther bar yet?" asked Tim, as he glanced at the rising tide.

"I don't know." I haven't tried yet. But I'll do so, for I see that the sand-bar is nearly all covered by the water now."

He started the screw, and the canoe ran out to the full length of the line, and began to tug at it.

The wreck did not budge an inch.

"Dot vhas no go," said Fritz disgustedly.

"I haven't got on full power," said Jack. "I'll try again."

He turned the lever all the way around.

A tremendous pressure was now brought to bear upon the wreck.

Tim centered his good optic upon the wreck, and suddenly yelled:

"Hurroar! She's a-movin'!"

"By Jove! So she is," said Jack delightedly.

The Hattie Hope's keel at the heel began to slide off the bar, and a minute later she was floating in the water.

Jack and his friends utter a cheer.

The oystermen upon the deck of the derelict were wild with mortification, and began to yell to their friends on the smacks to come to their assistance.

"They can't do us any harm," said Jack. "Don't you see that the sand-bar lies between us and their boats, and in order to reach us they'll have to go around the end of it."

"Aye, lad, but a-towin' that 'ere wreck we goes at a snail's pace," said Tim anxiously, "an' afore we gets werry far up ther coast they'll catch up wi' us, an' then pitch in."

Jack kept full power upon the boat.

"Hoist the sails," he said presently. "They will help us along."

His two friends complied, and the white batwings gave a new impetus to the boat.

In this manner they dragged the wreck a mile from land, and saw the smacks beating down the bar to get around the end, in order to follow them.

There were two rowboats at the wreck, and the more timid of the men of the crowd on her got into them, and rowed away toward their smacks, leaving half a dozen of their number upon the derelict.

As another boat they had had been sent to one of the smacks previously, and the two last boats that departed were laden to their gunwales, it would have been utterly impossible for the rest to get into the boat.

They kept up a dropping fire upon the occupants of the canoe, but did them no harm.

They then clustered in a group up forward, and Jack saw them make a line fast there, and drop the other end down toward the towing line.

"They are going to cut the cable!" exclaimed the boy.

"Gee whiz! That 'ere won't do!" muttered Tim, in consternation.

"Der first veller vot goes down by dot rope I vhas shoot," said Fritz, aiming a rifle out of one of the loopholes.

"I say!" shouted the boy.

"Well, what do you want?" yelled the man who had spoken before.

"It will be as much as any man's life is worth to go down on that line!" answered the boy threateningly.

A volley of shots was Jack's answer from them.

With a reckless daring worthy of a better cause, the man who had spoken to Jack now slid down the rope with a knife clenched between his teeth, with the evident purpose of severing the hawser on the starboard side.

Fritz had his eye upon the man.

The Dutch boy was a crack shot, and he fired.

The ball struck the rope to which the oysterman was clinging and burst, cutting the line to pieces.

With a startled cry, down the daring fellow dropped into the sea, and disappeared beneath the surface.

When he came to the surface he was far astern of the wreck, and he struck out pluckily toward the smacks.

They had all turned into the sea by this time, and were bearing down rapidly upon the wreck, as they were favored by a free wind and a strong current.

The man had no sooner fallen, when the rest, who were gathered in the bow over his head, fearful of getting shot, dropped down out of sight behind the bulwarks.

"Good shot, Fritz! You could not have done better!" said Jack.

"I tink so, neider. Give me some more, und I vhas blow dem all der beeses. Dim, yer oldt son-of-a-sea-gooks, vhy yer don'd tooken der het offer dot veller vot I made by der vater vonct?"

"Git out!" growled the ancient mariner. "I could aim better nor that wi' my glass eye. They're owerhaulin' us fast, Jack."

"Let them. They can't reach us with their bullets."

"No, but they kin cut our hawser."

"If they attempt to do anything like that I'll turn the gun on them."

The boy kept his glance fastened upon the pursuing smacks, and observed that within half an hour they would reach him.

The men upon the deck of the wreck remained quiet, never showing themselves above the bulwarks, for the deadly shots from Jack's guns had struck them with terror.

Forging steadily ahead under electricity and sails, the canoe made fairly rapid headway, dragging the wreck after her, and covered several miles before their pursuers came up within hailing distance of them.

There were six boats, and three of them went off to the starboard, and three went to the port side.

In this manner they closed in upon the wreck, and the foremost one dashed straight at the hawser.

As quick as a flash Jack turned the Avenger around, presenting the gun toward her, and opening the breech, he put in a projectile, and locked it again.

Seeing that the smack was intent upon severing the cable, the boy aimed the gun at it, and fired it.

With a terrific shriek the projectile shot through the air, and speeding true to its mark, it struck the smack amidships.

There it burst with a terrible roar.

The starboard side of the oyster sloop was blown to fragments, and several of the men upon the deck were seriously injured.

A chorus of wild cries pealed from their lips, and the smack began to fill up with water and sink.

Another of the boats sped over to the assistance of the crew on the injured boat, and a tremendous volley of gun and pistol shots were poured in at the Avenger from the men upon the decks of the other boats.

None of the shots did any injury to the metallic hull and wire cage, and the men who remained upon the deck of the wreck became so terrified that they sprang overboard, and swam for their respective sloops.

"Look there!" laughed Jack. "That looks as if we had knocked the nerves clear out of them, don't it?"

"I nefer seen somebodys so frightened as much before!" laughed Fritz, "and so help me shiminey, I don'd vonder at it, neider."

"Shall we give 'em a broadside, lad?" queried Tim.

"No. Wait until we see what they are going to do."

They continued on, towing the wreck, and saw the men who had been upon her reach their boats and get aboard.

The smack which Jack blew up sank a few moments after

her wounded and terrified crew was taken aboard of the other boat, and the remaining five smacks then tacked away, retracing their courses the way they had come.

They had enough of fighting the electric canoe, and now evidently abandoned all idea of regaining possession of the wreck to pillage it of its cargo.

"The victory is ours!" said Jack, with a smile, as he saw his late enemies disappearing in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BURNING SHIP.

The five smacks disappeared in the gloom, and Jack continued on up the coast, towing the Hattie Hope behind the canoe, and they reached New York Bay in due course of time, and brought the wreck to the city.

They remained tied up to a dock over night, and when the next day dawned clear and beautiful, Jack went ashore and reported the circumstance at headquarters.

He was highly complimented for what he had done, and asking for news of Dick Ford and one of his men, who were all that were yet at large of Redfern's gang, he was told that no news of the miscreants had yet been received.

As the boy had only contracted to break up this gang, he now had nothing more to do but capture the two men in order to complete the work he had undertaken.

He returned to the canoe and told his friends the result of his trip.

It is a question whether Ford and his remaining man are yet engaged in their nefarious work," said the boy, in conclusion; "but if they are, and remain about their old haunts, I will catch them."

"D'yer intend ter go cruisin' fer 'em?" queried Tim, lighting his pipe."

"It won't do to remain here idly," replied Jack.

"Dere vhas vun tings so sure as neffer vhas," said Fritz quietly.

"And what is that?" asked Jack.

"Ford don'd vhas come und look for us."

On the following night Jack started the Avenger out upon the bay, and they began a cruise which extended over two weeks, during which time nothing was seen of the men they were in search of, although during that time they were enabled to do many things in conformity with their office.

Jack was in despair, when he finally started to return to New York harbor along the coast from Delaware, to where he had gone.

It was a clear, moonlit night, and the sea was as calm as a mill pond.

"It looks to me as if Ford had gone out of business and has remained on land, boys," said Jack, as he steered the canoe after a large vessel drifting along with the tide a league ahead, the limp sails hanging unruffled from her long yards.

"Aye, lad; then s'posen we looks fer him thar, then," said Tim.

"Such a course would do no good, for the police have been doing that, and I am sure if they can't find him, we can't do it."

"Och, vot yer vhas crowlin' apoud alretty?" exclaimed Fritz. "Here yer vhas croáanin' ower tings vot can't be helbed some-dimes, vhen dere vhas der tuyfel der bay mit dot shib shust ahét of us."

"What's the matter now?" queried Jack, looking up hastily.

"Don'd yer see dot she vhas on fire, und der grew vhas escapin' in der poats? Holy shmoke, Shack—looker dot! "

A column of smoke had begun to pour up from the ship, and they saw two boats put out from her, and head for land.

"Good heavens!" gasped the boy. "Perhaps they might save that craft if we were to go to their assistance."

He put on power as he spoke, and the canoe shot ahead toward the ship, and soon drew near her, when the two boats suddenly darted between the Avenger and the vessel.

A moment afterwards the captain shouted from one of the boats:

"Say, where are you fellows going?"

"To the ship," replied Jack promptly.

"No, you ain't!" yelled the man gruffly.

"Why not?" queried the boy in deep surprise.

"Just because we won't let you—that's why."

"But perhaps we may save her from destruction for you?"

"We don't want any assistance from you! Clear out!"

"That's queer," exclaimed Jack, becoming suspicious.

"Looks as if the lubber wanted his ship ter burn," said Tim.

"Veer off, I tell you, and mind your own business!" yelled the captain. "We don't want any of your meddling with our affairs."

"Dot looks like if dere vhas someding grooked about dot," said Fritz.

"Just my opinion," said Jack. "They don't want us to go aboard the ship. Perhaps there's something aboard of her they don't want us to see. I wonder if they have done anything wrong to——"

"Help! Help!" came a distant, smothered voice.

"Hark, lad! Did you hear that?" asked Tim, with a start. "A cry for help."

"Und id vhas come from dot shib," said Fritz, with a startled look.

"By heavens, there is some crooked work going on here, boys, and I am going to board that ship if my life pays the forfeit!" said Jack firmly.

He started the canoe toward the drifting vessel, and a cry of excitement pealed from the crews in the boats.

"Haul to!" yelled the strange captain, leveling a revolver at Jack. "If you dare to board that craft I'll put a ball in you!"

"I'll board her and find out what that cry for help meant," retorted Jack dauntlessly, "and if I find that you have been doing any act of a criminal nature, I shall return and arrest you!"

He kept the canoe right on, and Tim ran up the pennant.

No sooner had the strangers seen the flag when they realized that they were dealing with a revenue marine boat, and became very much excited, rowing hastily away.

"They won't learn anything!" Jack heard the captain say. "By this time the fire must have gained such headway that all traces will be lost!"

The man in back of him said something in reply, but his words were lost by the distance widening between the two boats.

On dashed the canoe until it reached the vessel.

By that time the column of smoke pouring up through the hatches was tremendous, yet no flames appeared.

The Avenger had scarcely reached the bow of the ship when Jack put a hand grenade in his pocket, and hastily climbing up the martingale he reached the deck.

It was entirely deserted. Upon it in various places were a number of bonfires composed of oil-soaked cloths, and he saw that the hatchways were open to let down a draught.

"A clear case of arson!" he exclaimed to Fritz, who had followed him. "Those scoundrels have set this ship afire!"

"Och, du Heber Gott! No vunder dey didn'd vhas wanted us to go apoart!" exclaimed the astonished young Dutchman.

Jack ran over to one of the hatches, held his breath, closed his eyes, and flung the hand grenade down.

There came an explosion, and he leaped back.

"If that don't shatter the hull, I'll scatter that fire!" he gasped.

"Yer vhas sure ter knock a hole in der bottom of der poat dot vay."

"No. I did not hurl the grenade at the hull; I aimed for the combing of the lower hatch. Look there!"

A cloud of sparks flew up, mingled with dense masses of smoke.

"Help me to cover the hatches!" exclaimed Jack. "Perhaps we can smother out the flames!"

Fritz did so, and as soon as they were battened down they hastened up forward, and ran down into the forecabin.

It was filled with smoke, but not a soul was there, as they plainly saw by the light of a lantern swinging from a beam overhead.

"The person who called for help isn't down here!" said Jack.

Up to the deck they went again, and both rushed aft.

They found the captain's cabin locked and bolted, but the key was gone.

There was an ax handy, though, and seizing it Jack burst the door open.

The cabin was filled with smoke, too; but they saw that it contained a sailor, who was tied hand and foot, and bound to a post that supported the roof of the cabin.

He was senseless, but they had no doubt it was he who had given utterance to the cries that alarmed them.

Jack cut him loose, and upon seeing that there was no one else in the cabin, they carried him out on deck.

There he began to revive.

"Save me!" he shrieked, starting up wildly.

"Have no fear! You are safe now!" said Jack, soothingly.

"Friends—rescuers!" he muttered, staring at them.

"Yes, the crew is gone."

"And the fire—the fire?"

"We hope to extinguish it. Have they injured you?"

"No. Oh, the fiends! They tried to roast me alive!"

"What for?"

"I am, as you can see by my clothing, a sailor—one of the crew of this craft. We are from Florida. There was a heavy insurance on this ship, and upon a worthless cargo. The captain had a bad crew. The ship owners planned with him to burn the ship, and the skipper enlisted all the crew but me. Finding I indignantly refused to aid the scheme to defraud the underwriters, they consummated their evil work, and left me to perish here."

"Oh, the villains!"

"Heaven has balked their evil work for a good purpose. I can now go back to port and betray their rascality in time to thwart their design, thanks to your saving me."

"Good!" said Jack. "And we will try to save the ship."

He instructed Fritz to procure two metal diving suits from the canoe, and they put them on, and went down below.

There they found unmistakable evidence of a desperate effort having been made to insure the destruction of the boat.

Protected by their suits, and breathing pure air from their knapsacks, they extinguished what there was of the fire ere it did very much damage, and then went up on deck again.

"The ship is out of danger. We will tow her to port now," said the boy, and the sails having been lowered, they made a cable fast to her, and entering the canoe, they set off.

The crew of the ship had disappeared long before that, but they had not gone far before they were seen coming in pursuit.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

With such a heavy load as the ship in tow, the progress of the Avenger was necessarily very slow, and the two boat-

loads of men who were following, rapidly overhauled them. The rascals had been watching everything that transpired from behind a sand-bar, to which they had been rowing when Jack scared them away in the first instance.

Upon seeing that the fire had been subdued, however, they seemed to have come to the conclusion that if Jack got the ship back to port, their villainy would be exposed.

That they were bent upon wresting the ship from our friends there could be no doubt, but Jack was not at all afraid of them.

"How many people are there in those boats? he asked the man whom they had rescued, as he glanced at his pursuers.

"Twenty," replied the sailor.

"But I can only see eighteen."

"That is queer. Let me see. Why, the first mate is missing, and so is the fellow whom he was so intimate with."

"Did anything happen to him during the voyage?"

"No. It was Dick Ford who put the captain up to burning the ship."

"Dick Ford?" echoed Jack, with a start.

"Yes—that's the mate's name."

"Hoop-la!" roared Fritz. "Dot seddles id alretty!"

"So that's whar ther lubber disappeared ter, hey?" cried Tim.

"You seem to know the man," said the sailor in surprise.

"Of course we do," replied Jack. "He is the very scoundrel we are in search of, and the man you say he was so very intimate with must be the fellow who escaped with him. Where did you pick those fellows up?"

"The day before we set sail from San Fernandina they came aboard and joined the ship's crew. No one but the skipper seemed to know them, but we afterwards learned that they had just come from New York by train."

"By Jove! While we have been searching all over for them must have gone South by land, and thus reached Florida in time to join your ship's company, to carry out a plot to burn the ship, which must have been entrusted to Ford."

"Aye, that must be ther case," said Tim.

"Where could Ford and his man have disappeared to, I wonder?"

"Dere dey vhas, hidin' by der bottom of dot poat!" said Fritz suddenly.

Jack saw the tops of two heads raised above the gunwales of one of the boats, and he instantly came to the conclusion that Ford and his friend were keeping themselves concealed so that none of their party would see him and know he was among the ship's crew.

"He imagines he is very foxy," said the boy, "but he isn't quite as smart as he thinks he is."

By this time the two boats arrived in hailing distance.

"Ahoy, there!" shouted the captain of the ship.

"What do you want?" questioned Jack.

"I see you have saved the ship for us?"

"Yes, and you want to take possession of her, don't you?"

"We do. I am much obliged to you, young man."

"Go aboard! Go aboard!" said Jack, cheerfully.

The two boats ran up to the ship, and the crew went aboard, and under the captain's direction began to raise the sails again, when Jack shouted:

"The first man to touch a thing on that craft dies!"

"Pay no attention to him!" exclaimed the captain.

One of the men swung himself up into the shrouds, but ere he could ascend Jack shot him down wounded. He was Ford's friend.

The boy then swung the canoe around to the side of the ship, and cut the quarter-boats adrift.

"They can't get away from the ship now!" he chuckled.

He now had the ship's crew in just the position he wanted them, and started the Avenger ahead again.

A yell of rage escaped the men when they saw what he had done, and the captain roared in angry tones:

"What do you mean by sending my boats adrift?"

"I wish to keep you all prisoners," coolly replied Jack. "I have got dead evidence against you, and it won't do to let you get away from New York, as you doubtless intended to do, as soon as you got your canvas up."

"Say, do you wish to die?"

"No, but you seem to. Now, Tim, raise the canopy."

The sailor obeyed, and just then Fritz exclaimed:

"Here comes two steamers vunct."

"Ah! They are Custom House boats, too!" cried Jack.

The two propellers were rapidly bearing down upon them with revenue flags raised, and Jack signaled them with a rocket.

Upon seeing that their services were wanted, they came flying toward the Avenger, and the crew of the ship saw them.

Despair at once overcame them.

"We are lost!" gasped the captain.

"Destroy all evidence of the fires we started," hissed Ford, "and we can defy Jack Wright's accusation, and say that the fire was the result of an accident—do you hear?"

"You forget that he has got one of our men to prove differently."

"Never mind that."

The captain was just about to order his men to do as Ford suggested, when Jack came clambering up on deck arrayed in a diving costume, and armed with a brace of pistols.

"Every one of you go forward!" ordered the boy sternly, as he presented the muzzles of his weapons at the men.

With cries of alarm the men recoiled.

"Dick Ford!" exclaimed the boy, observing the mate stealing away.

"Caught!" gasped the rascal, pausing and pulling out a revolver.

"Come here!" said Jack.

"What do you want of me?" sullenly asked the man.

"You are my prisoner."

"Never!" roared Ford, and he aimed and fired at the boy. The ball flattened harmlessly against Jack's metal suit, and then fell to the deck and rolled away into the scupper.

Jack aimed at Ford and fired.

The ball struck him on the thigh, burst, and shattered it.

Ford uttered a cry of pain, flung up his arms, and fell to the deck.

"Curse you!" he yelled frantically, "you've maimed me!"

"Did I? You should have obeyed orders," answered Jack coolly.

"I'll reach you yet!" hissed the wounded man.

He raised up on his elbow and fired again, but the ball was no sooner discharged when Jack jumped over to his side and kicked the pistol from his hand.

Just then the entire ship's crew closed in around the boy and fired a number of shots from all sides at him.

None of them penetrated his metallic suit, and then they attacked him with everything they could get their hands on, knocked him over upon the deck, and fell in a heap on him.

At this juncture Fritz appeared, arrayed in his suit, and never waiting to banter words with them, he began to fire.

The crowd scattered, as several of their number fell wounded, and Jack arose and recovered his weapons.

"Up to the bows with you, I say!" he cried angrily.

Obediently they did as he told them.

"Now get down in the forecastle!" ordered Jack.

Down they went, and as soon as they were confined below Jack fastened the door of the companionway.

"Caged!" he cried exultantly.

"Bind Ford and the other fellow, Fritz."

While he was securing them, the two revenue cutters came up, and, to Jack's amazement and delight, he found the chief functionary of the underwriters' office on board of one of the boats.

He explained to the gentleman what had occurred, and his recital caused every one the most intense astonishment.

The two cutters then made lines fast on either side of the ship, and in this manner they brought her back to New York.

"My work is done," said Jack, when he unfastened the canoe from the captive. "I will give my evidence against these men in court to-morrow, and we will then return to Wrightstown, boys."

The following day dawned bright and clear, and when Jack reached the court, he found Redfern, Ford, and the whole crew of smugglers whom he had captured arraigned for trial, and gave his evidence.

They were all duly convicted on the boy's evidence, as were the men in whose employ they were working, and then the crew of the lost ship Jack saved were brought in.

The sailor whom Jack had snatched from the jaws of death proved a case against them, of trying to defraud the insurance companies and their employers were captured.

As there was no refuting the evident crime, every one of the evil doers suffered the extreme penalty of the law.

Jack's work was then finished, and Mr. Dicer thanked him in behalf of the Government for the services he had rendered, and remunerated him with a handsome reward which had been offered for the breaking up of the smugglers' gang.

The boy divided it with his companions, and they then took leave of their friends, embarked in the Avenger, and set out for Wrightstown.

Arrived there in due course of time, the canoe was abandoned for an indefinite period, as its use was over.

There was a letter awaiting Jack from Walter Jerome, and upon opening it he found that it contained a check for a very large sum of money, consisting of half he got by the sale of Captain Kidd's treasure. The youth had nobly kept his word.

His sister, he wrote, was married to a man of her choice, and he intended to establish himself in business.

Despite the fact that his friends refused, Jack divided the money equally among the three, and they found that their trip had been more remunerative than many of a more hazardous kind which they had undertaken in the past.

The young inventor and his friends were entirely satisfied with the result, and had no sooner settled back into the ordinary tenor of their ways, when Jack's busy brain began to devise a newer and more wonderful contrivance than any he had ever yet built.

Busily employed with it, we must now leave him and his friends, and bring our story to a close.

[THE END.]

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